



Reimagining Latin America: Histories, Futures, and Possibilities

Undergraduate & Graduate Student Conference

Villanova University • Connelly Center

March 26, 2026 • 9:00am-6:30pm

Conference hosted by the Latin American Studies Program and the Department of Spanish
Sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Latin American Studies Consortium (GPLASC)

Keynote speaker:
Dr. Paul Joseph López Oro
Assistant Professor and Director of Africana Studies
Bryn Mawr College

Invited artist:
Juan David Cortés Hernández
Documentary filmmaker

Cristobal Vega, Tinta de los ancestros, 2025. Oil on canvas.





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Independent Filmmaker

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Welcome

Welcome to the annual Greater Philadelphia Latin American Studies Consortium (GPLASC) Student Conference, *Reimagining Latin America: Histories, Futures, and Possibilities*, hosted this year at Villanova University.

This conference brings together undergraduate and graduate students from across the region to share interdisciplinary research exploring Latin America's past, present, and future. The day features student presentations, a photographic exhibition, film screenings with international artists, and a keynote conversation with distinguished scholars—creating a vibrant space for dialogue, creative expression, and community among emerging scholars of Latin American and Latinx studies.

We are delighted to welcome students, faculty, artists, and guests to Villanova University and look forward to a day of engaging conversation and new possibilities for imagining Latin America.

Registration and event details

To make simultaneous panels easier to navigate, the schedule and program pages use color-coded labels for each set of concurrent sessions. Attendees can follow the same color from the schedule page to the corresponding panel listings.

Student registration will be open from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM in the Rosemont Room. All events will take place in the Connelly Center, except the very last one, which will be in Dougherty Hall, West Lounge. All events are free and open to the public, including lunch.

Conference Schedule

Time	Program
8:30-9:00	Registration, Coffee, and Pastries
9:00-10:10	Concurrent Sessions I
10:10-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-11:40	Concurrent Sessions II
11:45-12:45	Photographic Exhibition, Inauguration, and Lunch
1:00-2:00	Film Screening of <i>El camino de regreso a la maloca</i> , followed by a Q&A with the director, Juan David Cortés Hernández, and producer, Dr. Óscar Aponte
2:10-3:20	Concurrent Sessions III
3:20-3:35	Coffee Break
3:35-4:45	Concurrent Sessions IV
5:00-6:30	Keynote Conversation —Dr. Paul Joseph López Oro in conversation with Dr. César Salgado Portillo

Color key	Blue - Concurrent Sessions I	Green - Concurrent Sessions II	Orange - Concurrent Sessions III	Purple - Concurrent Sessions IV
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8:30 – 9:00 AM | Registration, Coffee, and Pastries

Rosemont Room

Concurrent Sessions I | 9:00-10:10 AM

Panel 1: Afro-Latin American Identities and Colonial Legacies | Haverford Room

Moderator: Dr. César Salgado Portillo

- **Gala Rosas (Bryn Mawr College)** – *From Erasure to Reclamation: The Making of the Afro-Uruguayan Identity.*
- **Alessia Seijas Fuenmayor (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Afro-Latinidad, Indigenous Identity, and Panama's History of Rebellion.*
- **Bridget Sweeney (Bryn Mawr College)** – *The Afterlives of British Colonialism in the Bahamas.*

Panel 2: Music, Resistance, and History | Bryn Mawr Room

Moderator: Dr. Mikel Lorenzo-Arza

- **Jasmine Irizarry (Villanova University)** – *Del Caribe pa'l mundo.*
- **Jackie Araujo (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Lo que nos une: A Case Study on the Musical Practices of El Sagrado Corazón de Jesús*
- **Sara Brick (University of Delaware)** – *The Songs that Moved History: Corridos in the Mexican Revolution.*
- **Lyali Pereda Figueroa (Haverford College)** – *Gata, Woman, Gyal: An Exploration of Feminist Imaginings in Male-Dominated Genres.*

10:10 – 10:30 AM | Coffee Break

Rosemont Room

Concurrent Sessions II | 10:30-11:40 AM

Panel 3: Extraction, Environment, and Indigenous Rights | Haverford Room

Moderator: Dr. Cristina Percoco

- **Amy Garcia (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Corruption, Indigenous Land Right, & Racialized Colonial Powers.*
- **Dana Gahuancela (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Extractivism and its Imperial Legacies on Ecuador's Green Reputation.*
- **Angelique Lee (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Tensions between President Asfura of Honduras, Environmental Activists, and United States Interest.*
- **Rosa Ramirez Almanzar (Bryn Mawr College)** – *From Deforestation to Discrimination: Environmental Injustice and the Displacement of Indigenous Communities in Paraguay.*
- **Camila Caruso (Villanova University)** – *Extractivism, Dependency, and the Afterlife of Empire: From Petro-State to Mining State in Venezuela.*

Panel 4: Literature, Language, and Identity | Bryn Mawr Room

Moderator: Dr. Mikel Lorenzo-Arza

- **Jessica Mariana Garcia Vazquez (University of Delaware)** – *La influencia de la IA en la percepción de la realidad para la generación automática de textos.*
- **Matthew Adams (Ursinus College)** – *Una modernidad ch'ixi: Una investigación del valor de la utopía en Todas las sangres de José María Arguedas.*
- **Alan Ramirez (Haverford College)** – *El gótico queer costarricense-japonés en Fujirazu (2023) de José Ricardo Chaves.*

Panel 5: Conflict, Geopolitics, and Displacement | Devon Room

Moderator: Dr. John Cunicelli

- **Chelsea Urgilez (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Displacement, Causes for Conflict, and Limits of International Aid.*
- **Laurel Gabbard (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Reciprocal Relationships: Political Impact of Exchange of Goods Between Cuba and Other Latin American Nations.*
- **Yulissa Aguilar (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Mexico's Deportee Crisis.*
- **Cass Fischer Murphy (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Paramilitaries, Counterinsurgency, and Capitalist Expansion in Colombia.*

11:45 AM – 12:45 PM | Connelly Center Lounge

Photographic Exhibition, *Guardians of the Amazon*

An Exhibition by Juan David Cortés and Óscar Aponte

We are living in times of climate crisis. At its center stands the Amazon rainforest, protected for generations by Indigenous communities. *Guardians of the Amazon* features the Murui-Muina people of the Colombian Amazon and their role as protectors of the world's largest rainforest. Two central themes frame the exhibition: the Murui-Muina people's protection of their ancestral lands and the enduring importance of the *maloca*—the traditional house and ceremonial center at the heart of Murui-Muina life.

Co-created by Bogotá-based photographer and filmmaker Juan David Cortés Hernández and Villanova University history professor Óscar Aponte, the exhibition is part of a collaborative research project that began in 2021. Working with elders, youth, and community leaders, it documents oral histories, rituals, agricultural practices, and traditional dances. The Murui-Muina people are survivors of the Amazon rubber boom (c. 1890-1930), which imposed a regime of terror and slavery on the rainforest's Indigenous population to supply the Global North with rubber. Despite the violence and exploitation they endured, the Murui-Muina people have revitalized their culture and language, mobilizing them as tools to defend the Amazon from further ecological and social destruction.

The exhibition, sponsored by the Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest at Villanova University, will open the conference. Lunch will be provided for all attendees by *La ingrata*, a Mexican-owned restaurant in Camden, NJ.

1:00 – 2:00 PM | Connelly Cinema

Film Screening: *El camino de regreso a la maloca* (The Way Back to the Maloca)

A documentary film by Juan David Cortés and Óscar Aponte

Directed by Juan David Cortés Hernández and produced by Óscar Aponte, this 2023 Colombian documentary highlights the resilience of the Murui-Muina people in Puerto Leguízamo, Colombia. The film follows their struggle to preserve ancestral knowledge, traditions, and the *maloca*—their communal house—after surviving historical violence, including the genocide carried out by the Casa Arana rubber company.

Through vivid depictions of *mambeaderos* (traditional gathering spaces), *chagras* (agricultural plots), and daily life in the Amazon, the documentary explores themes of post-colonial survival, cultural resistance, and the revival of indigenous knowledge. Associated with academic research on indigenous resistance in the Amazon, the film offers a deeply immersive look into the ongoing efforts of the Murui-Muina community to sustain their cultural heritage.

Concurrent Sessions III | 2:10-3:20 PM

Panel 6: Artivism, Memory, and Reconciliation | Haverford Room

Moderator: Dr. Javier Cabezas Zapata

- **Claudia Rieckehoff (Villanova University)** – *Truth and Its Limits: Examining Brazil's Truth Commission and Unofficial Truth Projects.*
- **Helena Warchol (Villanova University)** – *Memoria encarnada, movimiento y justicia: Artivismo en Huellas de la memoria.*
- **Karissa Della Valle (Villanova University)** – *Teeter-Totter Wall: Desafiando las narrativas fronterizas a través del artivismo y el juego compartido.*

Panel 7: Literature, Poetry, and Memory in the Face of Political Upheaval | Bryn Mawr Room

Moderator: Dr. María Laura Lenardón

- **Magnolia Valdez-Lane (Haverford College)** – *Chilean Resistance Art and the Mapuche in the Wake of the Estallido Social.*
- **Isabel Selene Arbetan (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Redigesting Trauma.*
- **Glenda Isaura Da Rosa Mayeregger (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Indigenous Chronicles of Guatemala.*

Panel 8: Migration, Gender, and Community | Devon Room

Moderator: Dr. Lorena Ávila Jaimes

- **Victoria Navarrete-Ortiz (University of Pennsylvania)** – *La resiliencia de un millón: From Fractured Systems to Institutionalized Community Care.*
- **Ana Maria Ramirez Calderon (University of Pennsylvania)** – *Immigrant Women and the Building of New Destinations: The Case of Hondurans in Durham, NC.*
- **Katherine Wolfenden (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Eugenics throughout the Americas: A Historical Retrospective on a Newly Relevant Period of US-Latin American Relations.*

3:20 – 3:35 PM | Coffee Break

Rosemont Room

Concurrent Sessions IV | 3:35-4:45 PM

Panel 9: Institutional Trust and Sustainable Futures | Haverford Room

Moderator: Dr. Javier Cabezas Zapata

- **Srijanee Basu (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Brazilian Health System: Histories, Advances, and Challenges.*
- **Julia Lorenzen (Bryn Mawr College)** – *We're in Danger of Extinction: Social Impacts and Proposed Solutions to the Bolivian Climate Crisis.*
- **Erys Allemann (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Sun, Sand, and Sustainability: Bringing Socially Responsible Tourism to the Dominican Republic.*

Panel 10: Human Rights, Sovereignty, and Language Politics | Bryn Mawr Room

Moderator: Dr. Óscar Aponte

- **Hira Tomlinson (Villanova University)** – *Human Rights in Latin America.*
- **Mario Nandalal (University of Delaware)** – *Decolonial Sovereignty Today: Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago Power Politics.*
- **Julia Shatzer (Villanova University)** – *Bilingualism in Paraguay: Investigating the Survival of Guarani.*

Panel 11: Authoritarianism, Policing, and Carceral Politics | Devon Room

Moderator: Dr. Lorena Ávila Jaimes

- **Elise Cameron (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Fear, Crime, and Executive Power: Right-Wing Populist Security Politics in Costa Rica.*
- **Dahlia Nemes (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Where from Here? Migration, Government and the Future of El Salvador.*
- **Lizbeth Velasquez (Bryn Mawr College)** – *Sightless, but not Powerless: Will Venezuela Escape from the Cycle or Will the People Have a Say?*
- **Talia Co-Mided (Bryn Mawr College)** – *United We Stand: How Peru's Voters Have the Opportunity to Break the Cycle of Economic Oppression.*

5:00–6:30 PM | Dougherty Hall, West Lounge

Keynote Conversation

A dialogue with Dr. Paul Joseph López Oro and Dr. César Salgado Portillo

Paul Joseph López Oro is a third-generation Brooklynite by way of the Caribbean coast of Honduras. His research and teaching interests lie at the intersections of Black Queer Diaspora Studies, Black Feminist Theory, and Black Latin American and U.S. Afro-Latinx political thought. His first book, *Indigenous Blackness: The Queer World-Making Politics of Garifuna Nueva Yol*, slated for release in Fall 2026 with Columbia University Press, is a critical ethnography of transgenerational Garifuna New Yorkers of Central American Caribbean descent.

By centering the political and intellectual labor of Garifuna women and LGBTQ+ people, *Indigenous Blackness* unearths decades of hemispheric activism dedicated to preserving, protecting, and self-making Black Indigenous personhood in diaspora. Turning to embodied archives of ancestral memory, public performances, film, and digital social media networks, Garifuna New Yorkers disrupt normative categories of Blackness, Indigeneity, and Central American Caribbeanness.

Acknowledgements

The Organizing Committee of the Conference warmly thanks the Latin American Studies Program, the Department of Spanish, the Greater Philadelphia Latin American Studies Consortium (GPLASC), and the Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest for their generous support. We are deeply grateful to the presenters, faculty mentors, and student volunteers, whose enthusiasm, dedication, and hard work have made this conference possible.

We also extend special thanks to Anne-Marie Joyce, Administrative Assistant of the Department of Spanish and the Latin American Studies Program, whose tireless support in coordinating logistics, managing planning details, and ensuring the smooth running of the conference has been invaluable.

Organizing Committee

- Dr. Óscar Aponte – Department of History
- Dr. Lorena Ávila Jaimes – Department of Sociology and Criminology
- Dr. Guillermo Jesús Escaño – Department of Sociology and Criminology
- Dr. César Salgado Portillo – Department of Spanish

Conference Chair

Dr. Raúl Diego Rivera Hernández – Director of the Latin American Studies Program.