The Cadence of Memory:  
Revolutionary Propaganda Art in Latin America

From the Collection of Professor Peter McLaren  
Distinguished Fellow in Critical Studies, Chapman University

To understand our neighbors to the south it is important to know the political history of the region and why it has spawned so many movements and regimes unfriendly to the United States. This collection of revolutionary propaganda art from América Latina was acquired throughout Professor Peter McLaren's 25 years of engagement with educational and community organizations beginning in 1987. It reflects both the varied political iconography of Latin American leftist social movements and the powerfully orchestrated aesthetics of the revolutionary art of Las Americas.

Many of the posters and artifacts were acquired in lobbies and classrooms of the universities, schools, teacher education institutions and teacher union headquarters and community organizations visited by Professor McLaren, mostly in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela where he is frequently invited to speak on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and to develop programs in critical literacy and participatory democracy. The title of this exhibit speaks both to Professor McLaren's own memories of political and educational struggle and to the role that the politics of memory plays in national liberation struggles against fascist dictatorships and the dictatorship of the capitalist marketplace.

Polarizing figures who are often criticized by the official governments of North America, Europe and other parts of the world – Che Guevara and Venezuela President Hugo Chávez in particular – are read very differently in the barrios of Latin American cities where they are sometimes revered as popular saints. It is important to understand why if we are to build a peaceful world and to create democracy on a global basis, said Professor McLaren, who was the inaugural recipient of the Paulo Freire Social Justice Award presented at Chapman University in 2002. Freire was sympathetic to many of the revolutionary struggles depicted in these posters, and his work was often at the forefront of their educational initiatives.

There is a common consensus among progressive political scientists that the walls and concrete facades of today's barrios are ablaze with revolutionary figures such as Freire, Guevara, Chávez, Emiliano Zapata and the modern-day Zapatistas not by accident, and not only because human beings are vulnerable to charismatic leaders, but because of unbearable social conditions that include political repression, institutional racism, war, famine, colonialism, imperialism, the widening gap between the rich and the poor and political violence. Such a clash of political ideologies is bound to become exacerbated today on the global stage, given the current crisis of world capitalism, according to Professor McLaren.

This exhibit is not meant to glorify revolutionary uprisings nor sanctify particular individuals, Professor McLaren said, but to raise these questions: How do we work towards a common humanity free of political repression, violence, inequality and injustice? What are the paths that can be forged towards a world of peaceful co-existence? How can we work towards building bridges with our neighbors through dialogue and reciprocal acts of peacemaking?

This exhibit was curated by doctoral students Timothy Bolin and Ying Ying Yang from the College of Educational Studies Ph.D. in Education program and Theresa Paulsrud, Laurie Cussalli and Essraa Nawar from the Leatherby Libraries. Special thanks to Cindy Mitchell, student assistant Jennifer Lane and the Arts, Exhibits and Events Committee of the Leatherby Libraries.