Course Description:
“We haven’t found the key to break the code, the unity of our soul. We are satisfied with knowing we are children of the conflict of two races.” With these words, Mexican intellectual Alfonso Reyes could be said to have summed up the essence of that complex, dual cultural heritage known as “mestizaje” that was born out of the violent clash between the Spaniards and the Amerindians during the Conquest. “Mestizaje” is a foundational concept that has been broached by Latin American intellectuals as distinguished as Octavio Paz, and it still informs the discourse of national identity and self-representation of many of the Latin American nations. In this course, we’ll begin by looking at some first-person accounts of the Conquest, such as Columbus’ “Letter of Discovery” (1493) in order to understand how the first Europeans to set foot in the New World constructed the idea of the Amerindian as the “Other.” Then, we will study early critiques of empire such as Bartolomé de las Casas’ A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (1552), as well as Garcilaso de la Vega’s The Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru (1609-1617) –itself a product of “mestizaje”–, which sings the praises of a New World empire that was decimated by the Spaniards. We will end this course by looking at contemporary Latin American intellectuals who have tried to re-write the Conquest as well as others who have seen the fecund potentialities of Latin American “mestizaje.” Bearing this in mind, we may ask ourselves: Is “mestizaje” a cultural heritage that holds the key to the creation of the “Cosmic Race,” as José Vasconcelos has argued? Or, on the contrary, is “mestizaje” a cultural and spiritual burden that Latin America must continually endure?

Required Texts:
Periodic essays/handouts will be provided in class
Bartolomé de las Casas. A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies
Garcilaso de la Vega. The Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru (Abridged)
Octavio Paz. “The Sons of La Malinche” and “The Conquest and Colonialism” (available at the HC Bookstore as a custom courseware package)
Christopher Columbus. “Letter of Discovery”
José Vasconcelos. The Cosmic Race
Juan José Saer. The Witness

Assignments and Evaluation:
Participation/Attendance 10%
Oral report (plus 5-page written report) 20%
Take-home Midterm 15%
Final Paper (10 pages) 25%
Final Exam 30%