This course focuses on the use of images of and in the “New World” during the first century of Spanish exploration, conquest, and colonization in the Americas. We will explore printed illustrations that shaped European perceptions of New World “exoticism” and “barbarism,” as well as indigenous pictorial manuscripts that continued and adapted native visual practices and offered alternative views of the conquest. Besides reading texts by Spanish and indigenous authors in which images played an important role (Columbus, Las Casas, Oviedo, Staden, Léry, Sahagún, Guaman Poma), we will study nonalphabetic visual sources such as Nahua codices and maps, and festive performances of Afro-descendants.

We will also examine how images of the Americas were disseminated in Europe through copied illustrations, generating clichés and stereotypes—terms originally associated with printing techniques—that contributed to the racism and colonialism that have shaped the modern world. We will conclude with a discussion of examples of contemporary films that reimagine the colonial Americas. Readings in Spanish and English; the language of discussion depends on enrollment.