

Spring 2011

American Studies 103

Introduction to American Cultures

Monday & Wednesday 1:15-2:30
Scripps Humanities 202

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Course description:

This course will introduce you to important themes and methods in American Studies through a focus on the history and culture of the greater Los Angeles area. Much of our attention will be on the lives of people of color in the city throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. We will engage in discussions about race and racism; migration and immigration; labor, class, and organizing; suburbanization and white flight; and cultural productions (e.g., art, music, film). We will also develop a nuanced understanding of “Los Angeles” as a changing material, social, and ideological space. We will examine these subjects across a wide range of academic and popular texts, including social and cultural history, films, music, short stories, and memoir. This class serves as the introductory course in the American Studies program at the Claremont Colleges, but is open to all students.

Course Aims:

- 1) Introduce students to the important themes and methods in American Studies through a focus on the history and culture of the greater Los Angeles area
 - Students will be able to differentiate among the types of evidence and interdisciplinary methods used by American Studies scholars.
 - Students will be able to define keywords in American Studies, such as: race, ethnicity, gender, class, nation, transnational, and citizenship
 - Students will be able to differentiate among the experiences of communities of color across historical periods.
 - Students will be able to analyze a scholarly monograph and identify the author’s thesis and methodology

- ✓ This course aim will be accomplished through reading assignments, in-class writing assignments, class discussions, independent book review, and the final synthetic essay.

- 2) Encourage students to learn more about Los Angeles outside of the classroom and to connect this research to the material covered in class
 - Students will be able to conduct independent and group research on a specific topic related to Los Angeles
 - Students will be able to present this research in written form as well as orally to their peers
- ✓ This course aim will be accomplished through the final group project and presentation.

Course requirements

Book review (25%)

In conversation with one or both instructors, select a scholarly book in the field of American Studies on some aspect of Los Angeles of interest to you. We will provide a list of book suggestions. If you would like to read a book that is not on this list, please check with us first. Your review should do four things: 1) Identify the thesis of the book; 2) Identify the evidence the author uses to support her/his thesis; 3) Discuss aspects of the thesis that are particularly interesting and/or significant; 4) Identify at least one topic the book addresses about which you would like to learn more. Your review should be 5 pages (12pt font, double spaced). The book review is due Wednesday, March 9.

In Class Writing Responses to Assigned Reading/viewing (25%)

The readings and film screenings are an extremely important part of this course and are weighted accordingly. You are expected to complete the reading/viewing assignments outlined below and to attend every class prepared to be a thoughtful contributor and active listener in class discussions. Each day for which there is a reading/viewing assignment, we will start class with a short writing assignment. You will be asked to write for five minutes on a question related to that day's reading. The questions will ask you to explore one of the main themes, terms, and/or examples in that day's reading/film. These will not be trick questions and should be accessible if you have done the reading. Your responses will be graded as 1, 0.5, or 0 and will be handed back at the start of the next class. If you are sick or miss a class, you will need to e-mail Prof. Barron or Prof. Delmont a 300-word summary of that day's reading before the next class to receive credit.

Final Synthetic Essay (25%)

Essay topics will be distributed in Week 12 and will be due on Monday, May 2. Essay will require synthesis of several readings and an original argument. 5 pages (12pt font, double spaced).

Group Research Project and Presentation (25%)

Small teams of students will conduct field investigations of different sites in the Los Angeles area and will report on these at special class sessions at the end of the semester. This will provide more of a "hands-on" experience that will ask you to utilize and synthesize both the methods and the content that we have been studying throughout the course. The instructors will provide a list of appropriate sites, but you may also suggest alternatives.

Required books

- Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (University of California Press, 2006) ISBN-10: 0520246497
- Josh Sides, *LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (University of California Press, 2006) ISBN-10: 0520248309
- D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2005) ISBN-10: 0393327280

Introduction

Week 1:

1/19

- ☰ Introduction

Week 2:

1/24

- ☰ George Lipsitz, “Learning from Los Angeles: Another One Rides the Bus” (*American Quarterly*, Volume 56, Number 3, September 2004, pp. 511-529) (PDF on Sakai)
- ☰ Michael Willard “Nuestra Los Angeles” (*American Quarterly*, Volume 56, Number 3, September 2004, pp. 807-843) (PDF on Sakai)

1/26

- ☰ Douglas Monroy, “The Creation and Re-Creation of Californio Society” (*California History*, Vol. 76, No. 2/3, Summer - Fall 1997, pp. 173-195) (PDF on Sakai)
- ☰ Phoebe Kropp, “Citizens of the Past?: Olvera Street and the Construction of Race and Memory in 1930s Los Angeles” (*Radical History Review*, Issue 81, Fall 2001, pp. 35-60) (PDF on Sakai)

Week 3:

1/31

- ☰ Douglas Sackman, “‘By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them’: Nature Cross Culture Hybridization and the California Citrus Industry, 1893-1939” (*California History*, Vol. 74, No. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 82-99) (PDF on Sakai)
- ☰ Jeffrey Pilcher, “Was the Taco Invented in Southern California?” (*Gastronomica*, Winter 2008, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 26-38) (PDF on Sakai)

2/2

- ☰ Mark Wild, “Red Light Kaleidoscope: Prostitution and Ethnoracial Relations in Los Angeles, 1880-1940” (*Journal of Urban History*, September 2002; vol. 28, 6, pp. 720-742) (PDF on Sakai)
- ☰ Allison Varzally, “Romantic Crossings: Making Love, Family, and Non-Whiteness in California, 1925-1950,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Vol. 23, No. 1, Fall, 2003), pp. 3-54) (PDF on Sakai)

Week 4:

2/7

- ☰ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?: Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*, Introduction and Chapter 1-3 (pp. 1-115)

2/9

- ☰ Natalia Molina, *Fit to Be Citizens?*, Chapter 4-5 and Epilogue (pp. 116-188)

Week 5:

2/14

- ☰ Philip Ethington, “The Global Space of Los Angeles, 1920s-1930s,” in *The spaces of the modern city*, Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, eds., (2008) (pp. 58-98) (PDF on Sakai)

2/16

- ☰ Matt Garcia, “Just Put on that Padua Hills Smile” in *A World of Its Own: A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970*, pp. 121-154 (PDF on Sakai)
- ☰ Lon Kurashige, “The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II,” *The Journal of American History* (Vol. 86, No. 4, Mar., 2000, pp. 1632-1654) (PDF on Sakai)

Week 6:

2/21

- ☰ Josh Sides, *LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, Introduction and Ch. 1-4 (pp. 1-130)

2/23

- ☰ Josh Sides, *LA City Limits*, Ch. 5-6 and Epilogue (pp. 131-208)

Week 7:

2/28

- 📖 Hisaye Yamamoto, “Wilshire Bus” and “A Fire in Fontana” (short stories) in *Seventeen Syllables*, pp 34-38; 150-157

3/2

- 📖 Sarah Schrank, “Neustro Pueblo: The Spatial and Cultural Politics of Los Angeles’ Watts Towers” in *The spaces of the modern city*, Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, eds., (2008), (pp. 275-310)

Week 8:

3/7

- 🎬 *Killer of Sheep* (Screening TBD; discussion in class)

3/9

Guest Lecture – Kathy Kobayashi – Shades of LA

*****BOOK REVIEW DUE (WEDNESDAY, MARCH 9)*****

Week 9:

3/14

Spring break

3/16

Spring break

Week 10:

3/21

- 📖 D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*

3/23

- 📖 D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*

Week 11:

3/28

- 📖 Eric Avila, “The Spectacle of Urban Blight: Hollywood’s Rendition of a Black Los Angeles” and “Suburbanizing the City Center: The Dodgers Move West” in *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, pp. 65-105; 145-184 (PDF on Sakai)

3/30

- 🎬 *LA Plays Itself* (Screening TBD; discussion in class)

Week 12:

4/4

- 🎧 *Twilight: Los Angeles* (2000) (Screening TBD; discussion in class)
- 📖 Min Hyoung Song, “Culture of Wounding: The Riots and *Twilight*,” in *Strange Future: Pessimism and the 1992 Los Angeles Riots*, pp. 100-133 (PDF on Sakai)

4/6

- 📖 George Sanchez, “Face the Nation: Race, Immigration, and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America” (*International Migration Review*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Winter 1997, pp. 1009-1030) (PDF on Sakai)
- 📖 Sasha Costanza-Chock, “The Immigrant Rights Movement on the Net: Between “Web 2.0” and Comunicación Popular” (*American Quarterly*, Sept. 2008, pp. 851-864) (PDF on Sakai)

Week 13:

4/11

- 📖 Jooyoung Lee, “Blowing Up” at Project Blowed: Rap Dreams and Young Black Men” in *Black Los Angeles*, pp. 117-139 (PDF on Sakai)
- 📖 Josh Kun, “What is an MC if He Can’t Rap to Banda: Making Music in Nuevo L.A.,” (*American Quarterly*, September 2004, pp. 741-758) (PDF on Sakai)

4/13

- 📖 Henry Yu, “American Studies in a World of Pacific Migrations” (*American Quarterly*, Sept. 2004), pp. 531-543
- 🎧 *Made in LA* (Screening TBD; discussion in class)

Week 14:

4/18

Presentations

4/20

Presentations

Week 15:

4/25

Presentations

4/27

Presentations

Week 16:

5/2

Closing and evaluations

*****FINAL ESSAY DUE (MONDAY, MAY 2)*****