

COMM 360: The Rhetoric of Los Angeles

Spring 2008: Monday/Wednesday, 10 - 11:50 am, ASC-G34

Professor Vincent Brook

Office Hour: Monday/Wednesday 12 noon – 1 pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Yangna, El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles de Porciuncula, City of Angels, Sunshine City, Sin City, the Enormous Village, La La Land, City of the Future, City of Quartz, City of Forgetting, Postmodern Metropolis Par Excellence . . . Los Angeles has been called all these things and more—out of pride, envy, hype, fear, disgust, mis- and in-comprehension.

This course will exhume the many faces, facets, and feces of Los Angeles by looking at the Indian-village-turned-multicultural-megalopolis as a rhetorical text—that is, the geographical and historical entity/ies known as Los Angeles will be explored in relation to the vast, complex and often contradictory discursive constructions (in literature, film, television, architecture, politics, etc.) surrounding it/them.

The course is divided into four main parts. Part 1 examines the early written history(ies) of Los Angeles, from the imagined community's origins as a pre-Columbian settlement to its emergence as a major American metropolis in the early 20th century. Part 2 intersects LA's story with that of Hollywood, which as geographical site and generic term for the culture industry is itself an uncanny combination of reality and myth. Part 3 deals with film noir, the darkly seductive movie genre, many of whose canonical texts are set in LA and/or feature the City of Heaven and Hell as a main character. Part 4 explores the demographic diversity of Los Angeles—specifically, the histories and media representations of the African American, Latina/o, Asian, and White communities—thereby re-visioning LA's history from an ethno-racial perspective and bringing us into the multicultural present. The course concludes with a summary and review.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Vincent Brook, ed., *Course Reader* (CR)

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*

William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*

David Fine, ed., *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Essays*

In-Class Handouts (HO)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:

American Quarterly (Fall 2004): Special Issue on Los Angeles

Reyner Banham: *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*

Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*

David Fine, *Imagining Los Angeles*

Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*

Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*

William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*

Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles*

Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*

Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict*

Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island in the Land*

David Reid, ed., *Sex, Death, and God in L.A.*

David Rieff, *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World*

George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity and Culture in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*

Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*

Bruce Torrance, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*

David L. Ulin, ed., *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*

Victor M. Valle and Rudolfo Torres, *Latino Metropolis*

John D. Weaver, *Los Angeles: The Enormous Village*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- All assignments must be completed to receive a grade in the class.
- Late papers or assignments will be graded down 1/3 grade for the first late day, and an additional 1/3 grade for every subsequent two late days.
- Good attendance and punctuality are expected. Absences not only affect your class participation grade but can affect your overall grade as well. 10 or more unexcused absences results in an automatic Fail.
- Punctuality factors into attendance. Arriving noticeably late or leaving early (unexcused) results in 1/2 of an absence.
- Class participation is encouraged, and can affect your grade positively (see Evaluation).
- Cheating on exams or plagiarism in writing assignments are grounds for failing the class.

EVALUATION:

Term Paper: 25%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

Group Project: 15% (including oral presentation)

Class Participation: 10%

GRADING:

97-100% = A+, 93-96% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, etc.

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SCHEDULE AND AGENDA

(Readings and Screenings are subject to change)

WEEK 1

Mon., Jan 14

Introduction, The Origins of Los Angeles

Screening: *Ramona* (Part 1)

Wed., Jan. 16

Origins (continued)

Reading: McWilliams (CR); Deverell, Ch. 6

Screening: *Ramona* (Part 2)

WEEK 2

Mon., Jan. 21

NO CLASS: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Wed., Jan. 23

Origins (continued)

Reading: Deverell, Introduction, Ch. 1, 3; Davis, Ch. 1

Screening: Documentary on Hollywood

WEEK 3Mon., Jan. 28

Hollywood

Reading: Sklar (CR); Fine (Lehan)

Screening: *What Price Hollywood?* (Part 1)Wed., Jan. 30

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Fine (Locklin)

Screening: *What Price Hollywood* (Part 2)**WEEK 4**Mon., Feb. 4

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Fine (Winchell)

Screening: *Sunset Blvd.* (Part 1)Wed., Feb. 6

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Fine (Wells)

Screening: *Sunset Blvd.* (Part 2)**WEEK 5**Mon., Feb. 11

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Banham (CR)

Screening: *The Player* (Part 1)Wed., Feb. 13

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Banham (CR)

Screening: *The Player* (Part 2)**WEEK 6**Mon., Feb. 18

NO CLASS: PRESIDENTS DAY

Wed., Feb. 20

LA noir

Reading: Fine (Fine)

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 1)**WEEK 7**Mon., Feb. 25

LA noir (continued)

Reading: Fine (Babener on Chandler)

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 2)Wed., Feb. 27

Film noir/Neo-noir

Reading: Fine (Cooper, Crow)

Screening: *American Cinema: Film Noir* (documentary on film noir/neo-noir)**WEEK 8**Mon., March 3

LA Neo-noir
 Reading: Fine (Babener on *Chinatown*); Towne (CR)
 Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 1)

Wed., March 5

GROUP PROJECT DUE!

LA Neo-noir (continued)
 Reading: Klein, 73-93 (CR); Davis, Ch. 2
 Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 2)

WEEK 9

Mon., March 10

LA Future Noir
 Reading: Klein, 94-102 (CR)
Group Project Presentations!

Wed., March 17

LA Future noir (continued)
 Reading: Dimendberg (CR)
 Screening: *Blade Runner* (Clip)
Group Project Presentations!

WEEK 10

Mon., March 17

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

Wed., March 19

NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 11

Mon., March 24

Review for Midterm Exam
 Reading: None
 Screening: TBA

Wed., March 26

MIDTERM EXAM #1

WEEK 12

Mon., March 31

LA and African Americans
 Reading: Reading: Fine (Skinner, Muller); Bunch (CR)
 Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 1)

Wed., April 2

LA and African Americans (continued)
 Reading: Sides (CR); Davis, Ch. 5
 Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 2)

WEEK 13

Mon., April 7

LA and Latinas/os
 Reading: Miranda (CR); Deverell, Ch. 4-5
 Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 1)

Wed., April 9

LA and Latinas/os (continued)
 Reading: Garcia (CR)
 Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 2)

WEEK 14

Mon., April 14

LA and Asians
 Reading: Hata Jr. and Hata (CR)
 Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part1)

Wed., April 16

LA and Asians (continued)
 Reading: Cheng and Yang (CR)
 Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part2)

WEEK 15

Mon., April 21

LA and Whites
 Reading: Davis, Ch. 3; Sanchez (CR)
 Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 1)

Wed., April 23

TERM PAPER DUE!

LA and Whites (continued)
 Reading: Davis, Ch. 4
 Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 2)

WEEK 16

Mon., April 28

Summary and Review
 Reading: None
 Screening: TBA

Wed., May 1

MIDTERM EXAM #2

Term Paper Guidelines

- I. Due: Wed. of the 15th week.
- II. Length: 7-10 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, default margins)
- III. Topic:
 - A. Choose an aspect from one of the four sections of the course: Early LA History; Hollywood; Film Noir/Neo-Noir; Ethno-Racial LA.
 - B. Choose a literary or media representation (book, film, TV show, etc.) that relates to this aspect. You may include representations used in class, but your FOCUS should be on one NOT used in class. No two students may choose the same aspect AND literary/media representation; first come, first served.
 - C. Analyze the aspect and representation by applying one of the main theoretical frames discussed in class: e.g., palimpsest, whitewashed adobe, booster, debunker, counternarrative, ambivalence.
 - D. No matter what aspect you choose, compare the historical record with your representation's historical presumptions.
 - E. Alternative topics/theoretical frames are subject to professor approval.

IV. Method:

A. Title Page:

1. Title of essay, with main title and subtitle. The title of the text you're analyzing should appear somewhere in the main or sub-title. Puns are encouraged, e.g.:

**“Having Your Movie and Eating It Too:
Hollywood (Counter)Narrative in *The Player***

2. Name; Course Number; Term

B. Introduction:

1. State your topic: What aspect of the course and what literary/media representation will you be focusing on, and what theoretical frame(s) will you be applying?
2. Upon introducing your literary/media representation, for a book give the author and date of publication, for a film give the director and release date, for a TV show give the year(s) of its original run. This information can be provided in parentheses; e.g., *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992).
3. State your thesis: What will you attempt to argue or demonstrate by applying your theoretical frame(s) to your aspect and representation?

C. Body:

1. Proceed to apply your theoretical frame(s) to your aspect and representation.
2. Isolate and analyze pertinent passages, images, scenes, etc., in your representation.
3. Compare the historical record with your representation's historical presumptions.
4. Explain the significance of what you have discovered to the rhetoric of LA.
5. Throughout, integrate in-class and outside sources to bolster your case. All sources must be cited using one of the approved citation methods (MLA, CMS, APA).

D. Conclusion:

1. Briefly summarize your findings without being redundant.
2. End with a strong statement giving a clear sense of what you have tried to show.

E. Notes or Works Cited section.

V. Additional Pointers:

- A. Number your pages!
- B. Underline or put in italics all titles (films, books, etc.).
- C. When referring to creators or authors, give the full name the first time they are mentioned, thereafter only the second name: e.g. “**Robert Altman** did thus-and-so. In addition, **Altman** did thus-and-so.”
- D. When describing representational **content**, use the present tense: e.g., “In *The Player*, Griffin Mill **represents** a postmodern variant of the venal and corrupt studio executive”; “In this scene, Mill **displays** his moral depravity by **failing** to disclose his involvement in the crime”; “*The Player* **satirizes** the film industry's continuing sacrifice of art to the bottom line.”

E. To indicate films' historical relations, however, use the past tense: e.g., "*The Player* **was** the first mainstream U.S. film in decades to critique the Hollywood system"; "*The Player* **launched** a new trend in anti-Hollywood films."

F. No plot summaries! Plot information should only be used to support the thematic points of your paper.

G. No plagiarism! This will result in an automatic Fail for the assignment and, depending on the egregiousness of the infraction, for the class as well.

Some (Not Necessarily All) LA Films from Which to Choose

Hollywood (some may overlap w/film noir):

The Bad and the Beautiful, Barton Fink, The Big Knife, Bowfinger, Get Shorty, Be Cool, The Last Tycoon, Mulholland Drive, SlmOne, A Star is Born (1954, 1976), SOB, The Day of the Locust, Hollywoodland

Film Noir/Neo-Noir:

Bad Influence, The Big Sleep, Murder My Sweet, Farewell My Lovely, The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946, 1981), Kiss Me Deadly, To Live and Die in LA, Mulholland Falls, Mulholland Drive, LA Confidential, Strange Days, Heat, Collateral, Criss Cross (1949), Union Station, The Limey, Colors, Die Hard, Ask the Dust, Crash, The Black Dahlia, Down in the Valley, Play It As It Lays, Brick

Miscellaneous:

LA Stories, They Live!, Volcano, Escape from LA, Dragnet, Annie Hall, Down and Out in Beverly Hills, Born in East LA, Valley Girl, Clueless, American Me, Zoot Suit, Charlotte Sometimes, Real Women Have Curves, Boulevard Nights, Fast and Furious, Echo Park, Rebel Without a Cause, Magnolia, Short Cuts, Boogie Nights, South Central, Tortilla Soup, Los Angeles Plays Itself, Quinceanera, The Truman Show, The Loved One, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Swingers, Menace to Society, Don't Be a Menace While Drinking Juice in the Hood