The purpose of this course is to examine L.A.’s diverse population, not as isolated, discrete groups but in relation to one another. The city and its environs serve as our laboratory for understanding class, race, gender, political economy, and most importantly, power. We will examine, among other things, how the hierarchies of race and class are produced and reproduced, how gender, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship shape people’s experience, and how aggrieved communities fight back.

Topics will include:
- Methodological Tools For Thinking About Race, Space, and Class
- Intersections - Place, Race, and Class
- Prisons and Projects: Black Workers in Post-Fordist Los Angeles
- The Racial and Class Geographies of Kendrick Lamar
- Building Material and Discursive Walls
- Immigrant Labor in Los Angeles
- Organizing LA For Racial and Class Justice
This course offers an introduction to the people and cultures of the Americas; the social, historical, economic, and cultural formations that together make up the Latino/a American imaginary. This course starts with the U.S. Latino experience then works its way back to understand the origins of contemporary Latin America. Recent statistics show Latinos have become the largest minority group in the nation. We take a closer look into the societies of countries in the Americas and how their economic and historical past has shaped the course of the people of the Americas.
We will critically examine the social and political conflicts that arise and the challenges that migration poses to the ways in which national membership is established, public policy towards migrants is made, and the nation is imagined using the metaphor of border and borderlands to explore these issues. We will focus on current activism in Standing Rock as water protectors hold off the construction of a destructive oil pipeline, the importance of organizing with undocumented immigrants in this historical moment, and Native Hawaiian sovereignty and cultural revitalization movements.
The Viet Nam War remains as the most controversial and divisive war for Americans in the 20th century. The war is still invoked in debates over American wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This course provides an introduction to the war’s history in order for today’s Americans to understand some of the key factors leading the US into its current geopolitical situation. The course is a multidisciplinary, multicultural and international overview of the war’s history and its afterlife in American and Southeast Asian memory. Student reading will draw primarily from films, literature, art, journalism, historical writing, and political discourse, while lectures will provide necessary historical and political background. The course corrects some fundamental flaws in the American pedagogy and scholarship on the war, beginning with how the name indicates that the war was fought only in Viet Nam. The war was also fought in Cambodia and Laos, and the course examines the war’s impact on those countries and their peoples. Americans have also seen the war purely from the perspective of American self-interest and ethnocentrism. In contrast, this course stresses the diversity of American experiences, the importance of Southeast Asian points of view, and the existence of international actors in the war who were neither American nor Vietnamese.
This course offers an interdisciplinary introduction to American and Ethnic Studies. A principal goal is to help students understand how people in the United States live in and think about their country as well as how the world views them. The central themes and topics addressed will include identity formation, immigration, imprisonment, militarism, cultural production, religion, sexuality, and political change. This course will encourage students to formulate connections between these issues by placing them in their broad historical and cultural contexts. We will consider a variety of types of evidence such as novels, photographs, films, the built environment, and material culture to show that we can and need to analyze everything in the world around us.
This course is designed to give you an overview of Native American studies. Native peoples have and continue to resist settler colonialism. We will study Indigenous intellectualism and resistance through language revitalization, filmmaking, and the recognition of one another. Like other Indigenous scholars will discuss this semester, theories of Indigenous studies are not just for Indigenous peoples but for any person who wants to utilize them respectfully.
Popular culture permeates our everyday lives and has an enormous impact on how we view ourselves and the world more broadly. This course engages students in a multidisciplinary examination of the relation between U.S national culture, race, and popular culture. Beginning with an interrogation of the terms “popular” and “culture,” we will develop a theoretical framework and vocabulary for critically analyzing texts across a range of different mediums, including film, television, music, comics, magazines, visual art, Internet communications, among others. This course presses students to attend to how categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class accrue meaning through their representation, reproduction, and circulation in popular culture. Taking seriously questions of power and ideology, we will unpack the underlying ideals, narratives, and assumptions of the popular culture we consume on a daily basis and how they contribute to the exclusion/marginalization of certain perspectives, practices, and embodied experiences. This course critically examines the development and influence of American popular culture as well as the possibilities for dissent through sub- and/or counter-cultures.
The Sixties was a time of turmoil and peace, utopian idealism and nightmarish brutality. It was a time when love was all ‘you’ needed, yet war was all around. It was the time of the Woodstock Nation and the Silent Majority, communes and the Manson family. It was the time of sex, rock ‘n roll and drugs. It had Hippies and Yippies and Panthers, JFK, LBJ, and Nixon. It was a tumultuous period with contradictions, failures and promise that we are still trying to comprehend when we are not either damning or celebrating it. This course will examine this messy period. We will look at the ‘good’ Sixties and the ‘bad’ Sixties. We will read, watch and study a variety of texts from this time in order to gain a richer understanding of what this past has left us. We will also study later texts to see how The Sixties has been remembered and marketed. At the end, when done, we might discover that what we recall, what has been sold to us over the years, is not quite adequate to this moment when everything seemed so miraculously wonderful and often so profoundly banal.
In this course, we learn about the ways people of African diasporic descent have historically navigated the violent conditions of possibility for black mobility--both locally and globally--and how they continue to do so today, all the while creating a unique and vibrant (counter)cultural imagination of the world. We focus on the histories of large-scale migration that have been constitutive of the African diaspora, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the Great Migrations, modern histories of trans-Atlantic travel and expatriate life, as well as contemporary dynamics of immigration, exile, and cosmopolitanism. Most importantly, we meditate on black freedom dreams, and consider how they animate dynamics of clandestine border-crossing as well as black nomadism, flâneurism, and fugitivity. Primary readings include fiction and nonfiction texts from African, Caribbean, and American writers and thinkers who give testimony to the ways in which long journeys and transnational trips changed their lives and their visions of the world. Lectures provide students with historical and sociocultural context, introduce key concepts and terms, and supplement discussion with overviews of recent scholarship. Discussion sections review lectures and dig deeper into primary texts through in-class activities and assignments.
This iteration of AMST 285gm examines how authenticity – or notions of “the/a real” act as a galvanizing force in African American popular culture, shaping the way African Americans are represented and perceived in the world. This preoccupation with “a/the real” no doubt beckons another question; namely, what does it mean to “be real”? Further, isn’t realness and notions of “authentic Blackness” subjective at best? Such questions (and sure-fire answers) will be addressed in this course with considerable optimism and trust – trust that the tools of social analysis will help us unpack the socially-constructed and historically-contingent nature of race, representation, and authenticity during uncertain times, and hope that if we are present, prepared, and open, we’ll collectively discover how and why notions of “the real” have animated Black popular culture in the past, present, and (likely) the unforeseen future. In particular, we will excavate allusions to “the/a real” in Black cinematic tropes and genres (e.g., Blaxploitation), sonic innovations (e.g., blues, gospel, hip hop), corporeal engagements (e.g., “Krump” and other “Black” dance forms), as well as the affective rhythms, flows, beats, and agentic feelings these systems of representation incite about “real Blackness,” “real soul,” “real freedom,” and “realness” writ large. Our study this semester focuses on but a selection of the vast archive of African American popular culture; we will occasionally jump back and forth across time, space, and texts to unearth thematic and historical connections within this vast canon of songs, films, photos, poems, dance, and other sonic, corporeal, visual and embodied texts. Let your excitement build: with “authenticity” and it’s more gracious conceptual kin, “sincerity,” as our steady through-line, we stand to learn how and why concerns about “a/the real” act as an enduring provocation in African American popular culture, if not our own society and lives.
This combination of a Humanistic Inquiry GE course and an ASE elective draws upon a wide range of primary materials in history, politics, literature—and some music and movies—to study the rich mix of voices, cultures, and traditions from the region that is our home or where we live and study: the West, California, Los Angeles, USC. A key concern of the course will be to view America, the frontier, and the new West as scenes of collisions of people or as crossroads and intersections where people from different countries, religions, ethnicities have both crashed and merged together. We will emphasize both the frictions resulting from such collisions (e.g., war, ethnic cleansing, riots) and the fusions (e.g., jazz music, the Civil Rights movement, the teriyaki burrito).
AMST 332m (10421R)
Post-Civil Rights Black America

Taught by Kimberly McNair

Tuesday 2:00-4:50 PM KAP 147

*Course fulfills these requirements:
- Diversity Requirement
- ASE Social and Political Issues
- Elective: ASE Minor
- ASAF History Requirement

Analyzes the political, economic, and cultural experiences of the post-1965 period through an interrogation of contemporary conditions, movements, and responses to power in Black America. This course will focus specifically on Black Feminist perspectives on Post-Civil Rights Black America.
Is there such a thing as “Black American Islam?” Can there be? Should there be? What would distinguish it from historical Islam, and how will/should it relate to the global Muslim community? How do Black American Muslims relate to those Muslims who came to America from the Muslim world? What about Black American Muslim women? And how has 9-11 affected all of these relationships? As for Hip Hop, what role have/do Muslims play[ed] in its development and substance, and what challenges or opportunities does Hip Hop pose for Black American and other Muslims? Finally, what does all of this tell us about the future of Islam in Black America?
Examination of spatial and social patterns of the Latino population in Los Angeles. Emphasis on economic, demographic, and cultural processes.
This course is an exploration of the history and culture of Mexican Americans and other Latinos in the United States from the colonial era to the present. We will examine the diversity of experiences among this group across the United States, paying particular attention to issues of race, region, gender, class, and immigrant status. Topics will include the varied experiences of colonialism and immigration; the role of race prejudice and discrimination in shaping social mobility; cultural transformation and regional variations in language, religion and music; gender as a central variable in defining issues of identity and opportunity; and the birth of a Chicano/Latino civil rights movement.
AMST 440 Graphic America

Taught by Professor Dana Johnson

Wednesday 2:00-4:50 PM KAP 137

*Course fulfills these requirements:
- Elective: ASE, ASCL, ASAS, ASAF Majors

AMST 440 Graphic America: Reading American Culture Through Graphic Novels examines American identity and culture through graphic novels that vary widely in theme, including ancestry, race, gender and sexuality. From the early woodcuts of Lynd Ward, whose 1929 novel God’s Man was released the week of the 1929 stock market crash, to Howard Cruse’s Stuck Rubber Baby, which explores homosexuality and race in the pre-civil rights South, to Chris Ware’s Jimmy Corrigan, which examines, among many things, what it means to be American by tracing one family’s history, these graphically illustrative books will tell the story of America.
What can reading Latina/o/x literature teach us about race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality? This course is designed to give students an opportunity to study the diverse ways that Latinas/o/xs have narrated these intersecting experiences in literature, art, and film. Paying attention to the historical commonalities and differences among the various national origin groups, we will analyze the literary and aesthetic strategies that writers and artists employ in their texts. In focusing on how texts convey meaning, we will explore the ways in which cultural texts have shaped political consciousness, contested power dynamics through feminist and queer representations, interpreted the process of racialization, and narrated histories set across the Americas.
“Moreover, incorrect as we are there’s nothing wrong with us. We don’t want to be correct and we won’t be corrected” (Fred Moten and Stefano Harney in The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study, 20).

This class centers a queer of color and women of color feminist intellectual histories. Unfortunately, this history contains a lot of violence but this is not where our discussions of race, gender and sexualities will end. We will be closely analyzing novels, gender, sexuality, race, Indigenous Feminisms, history, literature, film, and law readings. I want to disrupt narratives of progress of sex and race in the United States. We still have a lot of work to do! I use a sex positive analysis and framework, so sometimes we will be talking about actual sex and it will be fun!
This course integrates approaches from the arts, the humanities and the social sciences to address questions of power and difference in U.S. society: race, gender, class, sexuality, colonialism, geopolitics. The arts, particularly performance, visual and media culture, will be a key focus. We will see and analyze a play, attend an exhibition, and engage with film, television, and social media as ways of exploring political and social issues. Students will also conduct an interview, offering everyone an opportunity to generate new knowledge about the issues we engage in class. Through multiple registers, students will gain a complex understanding of the workings of power and difference in the U.S. and beyond.

For all ASE majors, AMST 200 is a pre-requisite to take this course. Non-majors interested in taking this course can request to have the pre-requisite requirement removed by calling (213)740-2426.