This class examines the role of policies, cultural representations, social movements, laws, and political culture in shaping Los Angeles and its diverse populations. It focuses on Los Angeles because of its simultaneously long history of diversity and clashes over diversity. We begin by setting up the historical foundation of how Los Angeles was imagined as a "white spot." We then examine the span of the twentieth century to understand how the policies developed in the postwar, such as those pertaining to suburbanization, fair employment, housing, and education, were experienced differently across communities.
This class will ask you to read histories, fiction, film and social science studies in order to think deeply about the place of sex in American life since the nineteenth century. From slave narratives to interracial marriage, from coming out stories to films where sexuality appears only as a coded set of interactions, and from studies of the history of contraception, films about struggles against AIDS and research about the technologies used to change gender and to enhance erotic response, the course materials will help us explore just how much we talk, think and write about sex – about wanting it, not wanting it, having it, avoiding, punishing those who do have it, pathologizing those who don’t and policing bodies that seem predatory or dangerous. We will think about the history of sex panics, the role of medicine and law in making sexual identity and sexual pathology, and ask about how and why sex, religion and politics have become so intertwined in the US.
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.
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.
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.
This course examines black social movements for freedom, justice, equality, and self-determination. Beginning with the movements to end slavery and bring about full citizenship, we will examine the role of resistance, institution building, social thought, and the expressive arts in the collective action of African Americans and their allies from the 19th through the 21st century. We closely examine the manifestos and agendas of black abolitionists, women’s rights organizations, Black Nationalist, radical, and mainstream civil rights groups ranging from socialists to hip hop adherents, and from presidential campaigns to prisoners’ rights groups.
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).
Explores the changing political meanings of “Black music,” and the political activism of black musicians, from enslavement to freedom, from racial integration to Black liberation.
We will learn about the history of Latinx Los Angeles in order to learn about the larger politics of urban formation and transformation and how race and immigration has been central to this story. We will study trends, policies, and movements including Americanization programs, deportation policies, the rise of institutions, such as public health, and how they effect Latinx communities, as well as social movements and resistance. Secondly, we learn how to construct historical narratives through the use of primary sources, such as newspapers, but also cultural productions in the forms of art and music and archival footage.
This seminar is designed to allow students to explore the complex and contested interactions between the law and the construction of group and individual identities. Students will study theories of identity and community including racial, gender, religious, national, and sexual and will focus upon how the law has been central in defining, rewarding, and punishing difference. After a general examination of how diverse communities define themselves and their legal and contemporary problems, the class will examine cases studies.
Examination of Los Angeles diverse food cultures as well as the food justice issues that affect many low-income residents of neighborhoods surrounding USC campus.
Native Nations' and Indigenous peoples' rights and territories are under your feet everywhere you step. Learn about the legal relationships and histories informing Native American and indigenous resistance, resilience, and continuance.

Students across disciplines are welcome to engage in this 500-year old conversation about Indigenous rights to land, water, and sovereignty.
This class is designed to be an exciting and challenging introduction to the field of Asian American Studies. Asian American Studies was born out of the 1960s movements for social justice and equality. Thus, fundamental to this class is the concept of race and racial dynamics in the United States. Regardless of their racial identity, students will be challenged to examine how social identities have influenced their life and society overall. The main objectives of this course are 1) to gain an overview, from a range of perspectives, of Asian American history, community, and contemporary issues; and 2) to analyze critically important social structures in the U.S. and elsewhere.
The American Studies and Ethnicity Department at the University of Southern California offers a two-semester honors program for qualified students, first identified in ASE 350 or by the program advisor. Students spend their first semester in the honors program in an honors senior seminar, ASE 492, focused on developing their research and methods for the honors thesis. During the second semester, all honors students are required to take ASE 493, in which each completes a thesis project on a topic of his or her own choosing under faculty direction. Contact the program advisor for further information.