

Los Angeles: A Polymathic Inquiry
Guided by the writings of Carey McWilliams, Part A
USC Dornsife College of Letters and Sciences

Thematic Option CORE 499

Fall 2014 – Part A/Spring 2015 – Part B

Wednesdays 2:00p – 3:50p

USC Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study, DML 241

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Course Description

This course is a 4-unit course spread over the Fall 2014 (Part A) and Spring 2015 (Part B) semesters, consisting of 2 units per semester. The course will have one senior instructor/discussion leader and one co-instructor/course tutor. Each student will also be assigned a USC librarian archivist who specializes in the specific term paper/project topic chosen by the student. Each class meeting will have a block of required and suggested readings, and a guest lecturer who will enter into dialogue with the course instructors and students. The writings of Carey McWilliams – specifically, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1946) – will provide the framework and departure points for discussion.

Learning Objectives

As social, cultural, engineering, environmental, and demographic constructs, cities are among the most complex entities on the planet. As a world city, Los Angeles participates in this complexity. To study a city in its components and its totality, its people and its systems, its physical fabric and moral meaning, is by definition an integrated, interdisciplinary – *polymathic* – pursuit. Carey McWilliams—attorney (USC Law School), historian, journalist, civil rights activist, even prophet—wrote about Southern California from a polymathic perspective. In this course Professor of History William Deverell, Dr. Karin Huebner, and distinguished Los Angeles experts will guide students through a two-part, yearlong polymathic inquiry into Los Angeles as fact and imaginative creation.

No prerequisites required.

Requirements/Grading – Part A

For the Fall 2014 semester students will be graded on recitation in class, their personal course journal, a bibliographical essay, and a research proposal.

- 1. Recitation (15% toward each semester grade):** Be ready to share your thoughts and ask questions that have arisen from both the readings and lectures. *Everyone* must participate in the discussion each week. Your efforts and contribution to the overall learning and discussion process will be noted, evaluated, and graded. A successful session depends on your participation. This is the time for you to sort out any questions you might have, gain insight from the exchange of ideas with other students and faculty, and share your unique perspectives on the topics we are examining.
- 2. Personal Course Journal (30% towards each semester):** students are required to reflect and record on a weekly basis their scholarly journey in terms of the course readings, class discussions, personal research, and ongoing dialogues with their student colleagues and

course faculty. Students will review their weekly journaling with the course tutor during their scheduled bi-weekly meetings.

3. **Bibliographical essay (30% towards Fall grade):** the bibliographical essay is the introduction to your term paper/project topic and will evaluate resources (primary and secondary sources) related to that topic.
4. **Proposal (25% towards Fall grade)** your proposal is essentially an outline of your research project. Your proposal should include a. the problem, hypothesis, or question that your project/paper raises; b. the importance of your research; c. a statement of how your research fits within established fields/literatures; and d. what sources you will be using and how you will be using them.

Required Texts For Parts A/B (texts not posted on blackboard are available for purchase at the USC bookstore)

1. Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1946)
2. *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles*, William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds. (selected readings available on blackboard)
3. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (2009)
4. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (1990)
5. Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998) (readings available on blackboard)
6. William Deverell and Greg Hise, *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?idno=31735062135573;view=toc;c=pittpress>)
7. Joan Didion, (selected readings)
8. Joe Dominick, *To Protect and Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams* (2003)
9. Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006)
10. Judith Freeman, *The Long Embrace: Raymond Chandler and the Woman He Loved* (2008 reprint edition)
11. Leo Braudy, *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of an American Icon* (2012)
12. Phoebe Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place*
13. Nathanael West, *The Day of the Locust* (1939)
14. Readings from LA as SUBJECT: <http://www.laassubject.org/>
15. Selected readings available on Blackboard

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COURSE SCHEDULE

FALL 2014 LOS ANGELES: A POLYMATHIC INQUIRY -- PART A

August 27 – OPENING SESSION

LIGHT

Carey McWilliams opened his study on Southern California thinking and writing about the region as a “freak in nature,” uniquely determined by its relationship to light and climate. In this first meeting, we will examine the region under this *light*, as a case study of the integration between people and place, between nature and culture, and between performance and meaning.

Guest discussant: Rob Reynolds, Artist.

Required readings:

- Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (hereafter, Williams, *SC*), “Introduction” and “Forward” pgs. vii-xxiv; chapter 1, pgs 3-20.
- Philip Ethington, “Ab urbis condita: Regional Regimes Since 13,000 Before Present,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- Lawrence Weschler, “LA Glows,” from *The New Yorker*, February 23, 1998
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/23/l-a-glows> (also available on Blackboard).

September 3

ENVIRONMENT

The city is a recent invention in history, occurring at the most within the past 10,000 years of a 100,000-year cycle. Especially in the past 5,000 years, cities have arisen in one mega-region and show overlapping environmental characteristics. In this section, we will first take a look at the Los Angeles Plain as encountered by the Clovis people and developed by successive waves of human beings through various historical cycles.

Guest discussant: Paula Schiffman, Terrestrial Ecologist, Cal State, Northridge

Required readings:

- Williams *SC*, chapter 2, pgs 21-48; chapter 6, pgs. 96-112.
- William Deverell and Greg Hise, *Land of Sunshine: an Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles* (linked below); introduction, chapters 1 through 3; chapter 10; and all Folios.
<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?dno=31735062135573;view=toc;c=pittpress>

September 10

STUDENT/INSTRUCTOR-TUTOR MEETINGS

September 17

PEOPLE and ROOTS

In the thought and writings of Carey McWilliams, Southern California is both baffling and decipherable because of its people and their successive waves of migration, immigration, settlement, and itinerancy. This is a heavy reading week. Best to get started in on Flamming as early as you can.

Guest discussant: Allison Varzally, Associate Professor of History, Cal State, Fullerton

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 3, pgs 49-69; chapter 5, pgs. 84-95; chapter 7, pgs. 113-137.
- Stephanie Lewthwaite, “Race, Place, and Ethnicity in the Progressive Era,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- Scott Kurashige, “Between “White Spot” and “World City”: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), introduction; chapters 1, 2, and 3.

October 1

STUDENT/INSTRUCTOR-TUTOR MEETINGS

October 8

METROPOLIS

In this section, we shall consider Southern California as *metro-polis*, -- from urban, county, regional, state, national, and global perspectives in search of the region as real and imagined place. This and next week, we consider shades of difference, in meaning and influence, between region and metropolis, and we try to come to some understanding of the definition and history of “greater Los Angeles.”

Guest discussant: Christopher Hawthorne, Architectural Critic, *Los Angeles Times*

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 4, 70-83; chapter 8, pgs. 138-164; chapter 15, pgs 314-329.
- Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (2009)

October 15

STUDENT/INSTRUCTOR-TUTOR MEETINGS

October 22

REGION(s)

In ancient times, cities begat empires through conquest and economic annexation. From this perspective, Los Angeles, city and county, annexed and created Southern California. The rise of the two are co-eval, co-dependent, and synonymous.

Guest discussant: Thomas Sitton, Curator emeritus, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 9, pgs. 165-204.
- Louise Pubols, “Born Global: From Pueblo to Statehood,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- *Land of Sunshine* (Deverell and Hise), Part II (all; linked below)
<http://digital.library.pitt.edu/cgi-bin/t/text/text-idx?idno=31735062135573;view=toc;c=pittpress>

October 29

STUDENT/INSTRUCTOR-TUTOR MEETINGS

November 5

STUDENT/INSTRUCTOR-TUTOR MEETINGS

November 12

BUSINESS

What describes business in the history of Los Angeles? Industry? “The industry?” Our investigation this week examines the multi-faceted expression of business and entrepreneurship in Los Angeles and out from Los Angeles, past and present.

Guest discussant: Nandini Rajagopalan, Professor, Capt. Henry W. Simonsen Chair In Strategic Entrepreneurship, USC Marshall School of Business

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 11, pgs. 205-226; chapter 16, pgs. 330-349.
- Steven P. Erie and Scott MacKenzie, “Crown Jewels: Infrastructure and Growth, in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- Examine pstp-edison.com
- Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), chapter 7.

November 19

TECHNOLOGY

The city is a creation of engineering and technology. In this section, we shall probe the intricacies of water, power, sanitation, and transportation systems, relating these functions to the city in ancient times and suggesting them as extensions of the human body and need.

Guest discussant: Peter Westwick, Director, Aerospace History Project, Huntington Library and USC

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 10, pgs. 183-204.
- Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* chapters 1 & 2, pgs. 6-91 (selected reading available on Blackboard).
- Peter Westwick, introduction, *Blue Sky Metropolis* (selected readings available on Blackboard).
- Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), chapters 4, 5, and 6 [in preparation for next session].

November 26-30 THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 3 – CONCLUDING SESSION – PART A

POLITICS

The very word politics suggests the polis. From the beginning, as Cicero, Dante, and Tip O’Neil tell us, all politics – especially urban politics – are local. Following a consideration of the political history of Los Angeles, the present-tense political dynamics of Los Angeles will be explored from the perspective of Aristotle, Thomas Hobbs, and Lewis Mumford.

Guest discussant: Raphael Sonenshein, Director, Pat Brown Institute, Cal State LA

Required readings:

- Williams, *SC*, chapter 14, pgs. 273-313.
- Manuel Pastor, “Contemporary Voice: Contradictions, Coalitions, and Common Ground,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically:
<http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc>
- Raphael Sonenshein, “Bi-Racial Coalition Politics in Los Angeles” (available on blackboard)

December 10-17: BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY; TERM PAPER/PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.