

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

CORE 450

**PART A – FALL SEMESTER**

2 units/semester

USC Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study, DML 241

Instructor:  
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**Course Description and 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, or – *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 several distinguished Los Angeles experts will guide students through a polymathic inquiry into Los Angeles as fact and imaginative creation.

This course will have one senior instructor and one co-instructor/course tutor. Maximum enrollment is fifteen students with each student assigned a USC librarian archivist who will assist with the students' specific term paper/project topics. Throughout the semester, the class will also visit various sites of importance across the Southern California region for on-site learning opportunities to expand an understanding of Los Angeles across polymathic modes of experience. These include: The Huntington Library, The Los Angeles Natural History Museum, La Brea Tar Pits, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Disneyland.

The class is preparation for intense and in-depth research for undergraduate students. The course tutor works closely with students throughout the semester in twice-monthly one-on-one meetings. The course expands modes of analysis through polymathic learning, which will prepare the student entering the increasingly complex 21<sup>st</sup> century global community that requires inter/multidisciplinary approaches for innovation, problem solving, and ultimately success.

Broad learning objectives for this course include: 1) immersion in the conventions of academic research through guided instruction and mentoring by course and library faculty – i.e., forming research questions, learning methodological practice, developing bibliographies, understanding evidence and data collection, forms of representation and presentation; 2) in-depth understanding of Los Angeles “in its components and in its totality” and awareness of how the approaches used might be applied to the study of other cities or other topics; and, 3) understanding of evolving, historical notions of “polymathy” through exposure to disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches across the academy.

## **Requirements/Grading**

Students will be graded on their course journal, a bibliographical essay, a research proposal, class presentation, and final paper/project.

1. **Course Journal (20% -- weekly):** 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 one on one meetings.
2. **Bibliographical essay (40% -- due on assigned day of final):** the bibliographical essay is the introduction to the term paper/project topic and will evaluate resources (primary and secondary sources) related to that topic.
3. **Project Proposal (40% -- due on assigned day of final)** the proposal is essentially an outline of the research project. The proposal should include a. the problem, hypothesis, or question that the project/paper raises; b. the importance of the research; c. a statement of how the research fits within established fields/literatures; and d. what sources the student will be using and how they will be using them.

## **Required Texts—PART 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/>

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## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

### **WEEK 1**

**August 26, 2015**

#### ***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, McWilliams, *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).

### **WEEKS 2-3**

**September 2, 2015**

#### ***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:

- McWilliams *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?idno=31735062135573;view=toc;c=pittpress>

Tutorials: (Throughout the semester, tutorials will include immersion in close reading aimed at improving comprehension of course materials, planning and advisement on course research project, and writing analysis. In these one on one and small group meetings, students conceptualize and develop their projects under the guidance and supervision of the Course Tutor and individually appointed Research Librarians.)

Week 3:

Small Group tutorials (3 students per session) to discuss expectations of the course, the course project and possible topics, including review of previous students’ work.

### **WEEKS 4-5**

**September 16, 2015**

#### ***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 Flaming as early as you can.

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

Required readings:

- McWilliams, *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.

Week 5:

Class meeting with team of research librarians to finalize personalized librarian assignments. Mandatory individual one-hour meetings with appointed librarian to begin research strategies for student’s project.

Individual tutorials--planning and advisement on course research project, and writing analysis. In this one on one meeting, student conceptualizes and develops their project under the guidance and supervision of the Course Tutor. Includes review of student’s course journal entries, collected source materials, and the week’s assigned readings as each relates to student’s course project.

## **WEEKS 6-7**

**September 30, 2015**

### ***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:

- McWilliams, *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>

Week 7:

Class field trip to Los Angeles Natural History Museum, visiting the *Becoming Los Angeles* permanent exhibit, guided by Thomas Sitton, Professors Bill Deverell and Karin Huebner. Class discussion to follow.

## **WEEKS 8-9**

**October 14, 2015**

### ***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:

- McWilliams, *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)

### Week 9:

Class tutorial with Nathan Masters, program manager of LA as Subject, a research alliance dedicated to preserving and improving access to the archival material of Los Angeles history.

Individual one-hour meetings with appointed librarian to begin research strategies for student’s project.

## **WEEKS 10-11**

**October 28, 2015**

### ***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:

- McWilliams, *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
- Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), chapter 7.

### Week 11:

Individual tutorials--planning and advisement on course research project, and writing analysis. In this one on one meeting, student reviews and further develops their project proposal and bibliographical essay under the guidance and supervision of the Course Tutor. Includes review of student’s course journal entries, collected source materials, and the week’s assigned readings as each relates to student’s course project proposal and bibliographical essay.

## **WEEK 12-13**

**November 18, 2015**

### ***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:

- McWilliams, *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).
- Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), chapters 4, 5, and 6 [in preparation for next session].

Week 13:

Class field trip to Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena CA. Guided tour with Peter Westwick, William Deverell. On-site class discussion to follow.

Individual tutorials--planning and advisement on course research project, and writing analysis. In this one on one meeting, student reviews and further develops their project under the guidance and supervision of the Course Tutor. Includes review of student's course journal entries, collected source materials, and the week's assigned readings as each relates to student's course project. Preparation, review, and advisement on student's project proposal and bibliographical essay.

## **WEEK 14 – CONCLUDING SESSION**

**December 2, 2015**

### ***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:

- McWilliams, *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)

## **FINAL EXAM DATE:**

PROJECT PROPOSAL/BIBLIOGRAPHIC ESSAY 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/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html), (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto: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](http://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.