***Los Angeles: A Polymathic Inquiry***

A trans-disciplinary examination of the City of Angels

**USC Dornsife College of Letters and Sciences | CORE 450**

Part A—Fall 2017

2 units per semester

USC Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study, DML 241

Co-Instructor: Co-Instructor, Course Tutor:

William Deverell, Professor of History Dr. Karin Huebner

Office hours: by appointment Office hours: by appointment

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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.  Los Angeles fits this description in archetypal fashion. 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. Guided by the history discipline, but ambitiously inter-disciplinary, this course embodies a polymathic inquiry into the heart of Los Angeles through four organizing themes or conceptions.

1. **Los Angeles Imagined.**

Los Angeles, as any city, is the hybrid result of the real and unreal, of history and error, of certainty and hunch. As we move into our year, we explore *the idea of Los Angeles* first – we build our foundation not on what we know, but on what imagining Los Angeles can tell us about the expectations and obligations of the place and the city. This period of our course will fit well together with the *UNDER LOS ANGELES* conference to be held on November 11th, which the Harman Academy is co-sponsoring with the Institute on California and the West.

1. **Los Angeles Past.**

In this period of our course, we add the history to imagination and try to determine the ways in which they overlap and influence one another. In doing so, we ask questions about how historians piece together the fragmentary historical record in and about Los Angeles, which interpretations seem to have held sway (and why), and whether or not we can talk about particular “schools” of Los Angeles history.

1. **Los Angeles Present.**

In this period, we go into the city in search of today. Dynamic and chaotic like any city in the world, Los Angeles is (as it always has) undergoing deep and even radical changes: in its make-up, its urban forms, its landscape, and its view of, and place in, the global arenas of metropolitan life and culture. As we explore “L.A. today,” we will look to find the memories and influences of the past and the imaginary, because if we look closely, these aspects of LA will glimmer at us, too.

1. **Los Angeles Future.**

As we move to concluding our year together, we try to put it all together: imagination, the past, and the present, and we propose and predict the future. How can the amalgam of past and present help us predict the future? What can we see, as a collective of L.A. scholars (by the spring of 2018), about what we think will/must/might happen in the L.A. of 2019, 2025, 2050? And what building blocks will have to be in place – in economic, cultural, political, and other spheres – to make the future as hopeful, bright, and egalitarian as possible? Can L.A. rise above too-easy pronouncements of the place as either light or dark, as heaven or as hell, to be something richer, something and someplace more complex? And what will we have to do to play a part in this?

The class is preparation for intense and in-depth research for undergraduate students. The course co-instructor and tutor, Dr. Huebner, 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 21st century global community that requires inter/multidisciplinary approaches for innovation, problem solving, and ultimately success. In this, we take L.A. as our topic, obviously, but as our case study, as well; how do we bring polymathic expertise and curiosity to bear on a subject as variegated, complicated, and fascinating as this place?

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 bibiographies, understanding evidence and data collection, forms of representation and presentation; 2) indepth 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 (20% -- 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. **The Neighborhood Research Project (20%)**. Knowing Los Angeles – knowing any city – requires broad historical understanding melded with insight at the local level. Out of the “big view” and the “micro view” emerges knowledge and perspective. This research project is focused on the very specific, neighborhood level of research and understanding. The class will, once in the fall and once in the spring, choose a single neighborhood, which you will study in detail. We ask that you arrange yourself into teams of no more than four students per team. The teams will change, fall to spring. Each team will focus in on a different thematic aspect of the chosen neighborhood from the list below (you are welcome to propose some theme not on this list). Each team has the same general obligation to the assignment, and we will devote end-of-term time for presentations by the full class.
4. **Individual 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 and Suggested Readings—PART A/B (readings not posted on blackboard will be available for purchase)**

# Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

1. **Larry Bell** in conversation with Douglas Kent Hall “Strange Days,” in *Zones of Experience: The Art of Larry Bell* (1997) (available on blackboard)

# *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles*, William Deverell and Greg Hise, eds. (selected readings available on blackboard)

# Leo Braudy, *The Hollywood Sign* (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

1. **Octavia E. Butler**, *Parable of the Sower* (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

# 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>)

# Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (1998) (selected readings available on blackboard)

# Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* (1990) (selected readings available on blackboard)

# John Mack Faragher, *Eternity Street: Violence and Justice in Frontier Los Angeles* (W. W. Norton & Company; 1st edition; 2016) (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

# Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006) (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

# LA as SUBJECT:<http://www.laassubject.org/>

1. **Adrienne Lafrance,** “How *The Twilight Zone* Predicted our Paranoid Present,” in *The Atlantic* (Dec. 31, 2013) (available on blackboard)

# Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1946) (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

1. **Marlyn Musicant**, *Los Angeles Union Station* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014) Please note: this book will be provided to students.
2. **Nancy Perloff,** “Tap City Circus,” in *Pacific Standard Time: Los Angeles Art 1945-1980*, Rebecca Peabody, Andrew Perchuk, Glenn Phillips, and Rani Singh, eds. (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011) (available on blackboard)
3. **Sarah Schrank**, *Art and the City: Civic Imaginations and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009) (available on blackboard)

# D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2013) (available for purchase at USC bookstore)

1. **Lawrence Weschler,** “LA Glows,” from *The New Yorker,* February 23, 1998 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/23/l-a-glows> (available on blackboard)
2. **David Ulin,** *Sidewalking* (available for purchase at USC bookstore)
3. **Alan Zilberman,** “*Escape From L.A*., Today: How a 1996 Sci-Fi Thriller Imagined the Year 2013,” in *The Atlantic Monthly (Aug. 8, 2013)*

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**

**FALL SEMESTER 2017**

**August 23**

***INTRODUCTION TO YEARLONG COURSE***

* Greetings!
* go over syllabus
* discuss upcoming field trips (LA RIVER KAYAKING; BIG CREEK HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT; BECOMING LOS ANGELES EXHIBIT; ROB REYNOLDS’ STUDIO TOUR; ARCHITECTUAL TOUR; DISNEYLAND, JPL)
* go over Team Research Project
* Tutorial with archival research librarians to discuss Team Research Project; select teams; hand out Hollinger boxes; and hit the streets.

**August 30**

Instructional session with **Elizabeth Galoozis**, director, Information Literacy, USC Libraries

**September 6**

***LIGHT***

In this first discussion session, we will examine the region under *light*, as a case study of the integration between imagination, people, and place, between nature and culture, and between performance and meaning.

Guest discussant: **Rob Reynolds,** artist

Reading for the week:

* Lawrence Weschler, “LA Glows,” from *The New Yorker,* February 23, 1998 <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1998/02/23/l-a-glows> (available on Blackboard).
* Peruse Rob Reynolds’ website: <http://robreynolds.net/>

**September 13**

***ARTISTS AND REDBAITING***

[on-site visit to the “Hollywood Ten” installation by Fisher Museum]

Guest discussant: **Monica Steinberg,** USC Postdoctoral Scholar

Readings for the week:

* Sarah Schrank, *Art and the City: Civic Imaginations and Cultural Authority in Los Angeles* (excerpts available on Blackboard)
* Nancy Perloff, “Tap City Circus,” in *Pacific Standard Time* (available on Blackboard)
* Larry Bell in conversation with Douglas Kent Hall “Strange Days,” in *Zones of Experience* (available on Blackboard)

**September 20**

One on one, 20 minute meeting with Prof. Huebner

These meetings involve individual 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 Prof. Huebner. Includes review of student’s course journal entries, collected source materials, and the week’s assigned readings as each corresponds to student’s course project and developing research.

(*Throughout the year, 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.*)

**September 27**

***OCTAVIA BUTLER***

Guest discussant: **Lynell George**, writer

Readings for the week:

* Octavia E. Butler, *Parable of the Sower*

**October 4**

Field trip to the *Becoming Los Angeles* exhibit at the Natural History Museum

**October 7-8**

BIG CREEK HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT field trip

Guided by John Mount, SCE Project Manager, US Forester, Historian of the Central Sierras

**October 11**

***LA SUBURBIA***

Guest discussant: **D.J. Waldie,** writer

Readings for the week:

* D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land*
* Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), introduction; chapters 1, 2, and 3.

**October 18**

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.

Joined by librarians expert on your yearlong project topics.

**October 25**

***FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD LOS ANGELES:*** *A METROPOLITAN* *SCHEMA*

Guest discussant: **Christopher Hawthorne,** architectural critic, writer

Readings for the week:

* Hawthorne clips
* Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (2009)

**November 1**

One on one, 20 minute meeting with Prof. Huebner

**November 8**

***UNDER LA***

Guest discussant: **Jo-Ellen Demitrius**

Readings for the week:

* TBD

**November 11 (Sat)**: ***UNDER LOS ANGELES***

Presented by the USC Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study, the USC-Huntingon Institute for California and the West and USC Dornsife, this conference explores the multifaceted worlds of inquiry that exist under the ground of Los Angeles--from earthquakes to cemeteries, transportation systems to aquifers.

**November 15**

One on one, 20 minute meeting with Prof. Huebner

**November 22**

*Thanksgiving Holiday begins—no class this week*

**November 29**

***RACE AND SPACE*** (we began with light, we fall into NOIR)

Guest discussant: **Annette Kim,** associate professor, Sol Price School of Public Policy

Readings for the week:

* Douglas Flamming, *Bound For Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006), review introduction; chapters 1, 2, and 3.
* Stephanie Lewthwaite, “Race, Place, and Ethnicity in the Progressive Era,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically and on blackboard: [http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc](https://ch1prd0710.outlook.com/owa/redir.aspx?C=9_rXztDU9UWBE0KcaLNeXoEfjkaccNAIs1I-vPH3PUcgbHq8fAZBSrdLGbi8JEMMI7VMd2n4Sm8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fzb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com%2f%3fV%3d1.0%26L%3dZB5LH7ED7A%26S%3dJCs%26C%3dTC0000414482%26T%3dmarc)
* Scott Kurashige, “Between “White Spot” and “World City”: Racial Integration and the Roots of Multiculturalism,” in *Blackwell Companion to Los Angeles* available electronically and on blackboard: [http://zb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com/?V=1.0&L=ZB5LH7ED7A&S=JCs&C=TC0000414482&T=marc](https://ch1prd0710.outlook.com/owa/redir.aspx?C=9_rXztDU9UWBE0KcaLNeXoEfjkaccNAIs1I-vPH3PUcgbHq8fAZBSrdLGbi8JEMMI7VMd2n4Sm8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fzb5lh7ed7a.search.serialssolutions.com%2f%3fV%3d1.0%26L%3dZB5LH7ED7A%26S%3dJCs%26C%3dTC0000414482%26T%3dmarc)

**PLEASE NOTE: Team Research Project reports are due today, Nov 29 at beginning of class;** team presentations of Hollinger boxes will be given on January 10, 2018—first class meeting spring semester]

**FINAL EXAM DATE: Wednesday, December 13**

**PROJECT PROPOSAL/BIBLIOGRAPHY 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](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.