



COMM 360: The Rhetoric of Los Angeles
Tuesday/Thursday: 12:30 - 1:50 pm
ANN L105A
USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism

Professor:
Josh Kun
Email: jkun@usc.edu
Office: KER 212
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10-1 & by appointment

TAs:
Perry Johnson
Email: pjohnso@usc.edu
Brooklyne Gipson
Email: bgipson@usc.edu

Course Description

This course explores representations of Los Angeles communicated in diverse media and diverse forms of popular culture. What is the rhetoric of Los Angeles? How is it expressed, produced, and received? We will analyze cultural identities, urban geography, film and video, visual art, the built environment, food, and popular music as a means of peeling back the layers of Los Angeles as a city, as a text, as a medium, and as an experiment in urban struggle, survival, community, and growth. Our principal theme is living and dying in Los Angeles, the promises of sunshine and the realities of noir, L.A. as both a city of dreams and a dream dump. For this year's version of the course, I have structured its inquiries, contents, and assignments around the launch of *PST: LA/LA*, the Getty Foundation's region-wide exploration of connections between Los Angeles and Latin America through art, performance, and music (info here: <http://www.pacificstandardtime.org>). Thus, in addition to focusing on urbanism, racial unrest, the uprisings of 1965 and 1992, food culture, and the role of film and music in negotiating the city's meanings and histories, students will be required to engage directly with exhibitions and events connected to *PST: LA/LA*.

Course Requirements and Attendance

This course will mix lectures, class discussion, and required off-campus exhibition visits. This course will require you to actively and critically read and engage course materials and focus on developing your research and analytical skills. This is an upper division seminar, and students are required to attend class regularly, to contribute to class discussions, and to do all weekly reading. Lectures will distill the main ideas and help you make concise study notes; therefore attendance in lecture is vital. You are allowed only one unexcused absence, after which there is a deduction of half a grade off the final grade for each unexcused absence.

Again, you are expected to critically analyze the readings and come to class prepared to contribute and share your ideas and opinions. Students are also encouraged to use the classroom as a space and community to voice their opinions and share their theoretical concerns and areas where their research and scholarship can be enhanced. It is vital that we create a space where diverging points of view and mutual respect are celebrated, so disrespect of any kind will not be tolerated. Lastly, there are several writing assignments for this class, and because the lectures, discussions, reading assignments, and course assignments are all vitally linked, it is critical that you keep up with the schedule.

You will receive details about each assignment separately. All assignments must be completed and handed in on time to avoid a grade reduction (1/3 of a grade reduction per day including weekends). If you are unable to turn in an assignment due to illness or a personal emergency, you must provide written documentation that will allow you to be excused, or discuss your situation with us in a timely manner. Do not wait until the end of the term to sort things out.

A more clear and detailed description of how your assignments will be graded and evaluated will be handed out at a later date.

Final Grade Distribution

- 10% Class participation (not based solely on attendance)
- 10% Weekly Reading Blog Posts (no late posts accepted)
- 20% Analytical Essay (4-6 pp)
- 20% L.A. Mixtape
- 20% Archival Research Essay (4-6 pp)
- 20% Exhibition Essay (4-6 pp.)

You must complete ALL of these assignments in order to pass the course. Failing to complete ONE OR MORE of them will result in an F in the class. If you have concerns regarding a grade on a given assignment, you must appeal it in writing, stating the reasons why you feel the grade is inaccurate, within one week of receiving the graded assignment. No late appeals will be accepted for review.

Required Texts

(for purchase, please use bookstores or online retailers)

- Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*
- All other required readings can be found on Blackboard at: <https://blackboard.usc.edu/>

Also Recommended for Purchase

- Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising And The 1960s*
- Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*
- Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land*

Annenberg School for Communication Academic Integrity Policy:

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and may be dismissed as a major.

In addition to the formal academic integrity policy, our pedagogical policy is based on mutual respect; all students are encouraged to use the classroom as a space in which to speak and to voice their opinions. Our expectation is that you will respect not only the professors but also your fellow classmates when they are participating in discussion.

It is vital that you always bring a notebook/notepad, paper and pen to every class. We will frequently spend small segments of class time working on in-class writing assignments and you will have to periodically hand in these documents.

Effective fall 2014, all undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors will be required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used in Annenberg classes. Please refer to the Annenberg Virtual Commons for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's Information Technology Services website. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that use of computer in the classroom is a privilege. You may use a computer in the classroom ONLY for taking notes or for class presentations. If you abuse this privilege by checking email or going on the Internet, updating Facebook profiles, IM-ing friends, or playing solitaire, etc., you will be marked as absent for that class period. All other electronic devices (cell phones, MP3 players, etc.) must be turned off and put away during class time. If this kind of activity gets to be a problem, laptop computers will not be allowed in the classroom.

Plagiarism - 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. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as Communication school administrators.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

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.

Stress Management

Students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

Sexual Assault Resource Center

The Center for Women & Men and the Sexual Assault Resource Center are one and the same. Student Counseling Services is a separate place that also offers confidential counseling and support groups on a variety of other topics. To schedule an appointment with Student Counseling Services, call (213) 740-7711 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or visit the Engemann Student Health Center on the University Park Campus.

Schedule of Readings

All readings should be completed by the class date for which they are assigned. All blog posts due by Wednesday 5 pm.

8/22 Lawrence Weschler, "L.A. Glows;" Miranda, George, Waldie, and Kun, "[How To Look At Los Angeles](#)"

8/24 Mike Davis, "Sunshine or Noir?"

8/29 Carey McWilliams, "The Indian in the Closet," "The Growth of a Legend"

8/31 Joan Didion, "Los Angeles Notebook"; John McPhee, "Los Angeles Against the Mountains"

9/5 Norman Klein, "Booster Myths, Urban Erasure"

9/7 Howard N. Fox, "Playing With Fire"; Chon A. Noriega and Pilar Tompkins Rivas, "Chicano Art in the City of Dreams"; **Exhibitions: Carlos Almaraz, Home (LACMA)**

9/12 ANALYTICAL ESSAY DUE Reyner Banham, from *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*; Frederic Jameson, from *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*

9/14 Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*

9/19 Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*

9/21 Clara Bryant et al., "The Formation of Los Angeles' Black Community," "The Emergence of Central Avenue"; Barney Hoskyns, "On the Avenue"

9/26 George Sanchez, "Familiar Sounds of Change: Music and the Growth of Mass Culture"; Colin Gunckel, from *Mexico on Main Street*

9/28 Sandra de la Loza, "La Raza C3smica," Ana Elena Mallet, "Mexico City-L.A.: Design Dialogues"; **Exhibitions: Mart3n Ramirez (ICA/LA), Laura Aguilar (VPMA), Found in Translation (LACMA), ¡Murales Rebeldes! (La Plaza de Culturas y Artes)**

10/3 Eric Avila, "The Nation's White Spot: Racializing Postwar Los Angeles"

10/5 **MIXTAPE DUE**; Kirse May Granat, from *Golden State, Golden Youth*

10/10 Eric Avila, "Rage for Order: Disneyland and the Suburban Ideal"

10/12 Octavio Paz, "The Pachuco and Other Extremes"; Carey McWilliams from *North From Mexico*; George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc"

10/17 Barney Hoskyns, "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Canyon"; Joan Didion, "The White Album"

10/19 "The View From Watts," *Los Angeles Times*; Gerald Horne, from *The Fire This Time*

10/24 Steve Isoardi, from *The Dark Tree*; Jacqueline Stewart, "Defending Black Imagination: The L.A. Rebellion School of Black Filmmakers"; in class screenings of LA Rebellion films

10/26 Kellie Jones, from *South of Pico*

10/31 Lisa Lowe, "Imagining Los Angeles in the Production of Multiculturalism"; *Blade Runner*

11/2 Brenda Stevenson, from *The Contested Murder of Latasha Harlins*

11/7 Mike Davis, "The Hammer and the Rock"; Elizabeth Alexander, "Can You Be BLACK and Look at This?: Reading the Rodney King Video(s)"

11/9 Exhibitions: *Talking to Action (Otis)*; *Universal History of Infamy (LACMA)*; *Eduardo Sarabia (Mistake Room)*; *Surface Tension (Skirball)*

11/14 **ARCHIVAL RESEARCH DUE**; Jeff Chang, "The Culture Assassins"; Adam Shatz, "Kamasi Washington's Giant Step"; Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, "When the Lights Shut Off"

11/16 Robert Gottlieb, "City of Migrations"; Lawrence Weschler, "The Domestic Idylls of Ramiro Gomez"

11/21 Jonathan Gold, "The Year I Ate Pico Boulevard"; David Pierson, "Why Are Doughnut Boxes Pink?"; Roy Choi, from *L.A. Son*

11/23 Thanksgiving Holiday - no class

11/28 *La La Land*

11/30 A Third L.A.? <https://www.kcet.org/category/third-la>

EXHIBITION ESSAY DUE DECEMBER 12