

Fall 2009
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GEOG 100: Los Angeles and the American Dream

Since its early days, boosters of Los Angeles have promised the American dream: balmy winters, beaches, and beautiful people. Others have argued that Los Angeles is the antithesis of paradise: it is sprawling, unequal, and prone to natural disasters. The real city is more complex. It is neither heaven nor hell, but a real place with real people. This course considers the disparities between the Los Angeles of our imagination and the realities of everyday life in the city. It also examines how these ideas about the city affect what happens on the ground.

The first part of the course will focus on the history and geography of Los Angeles. The second part of the course will examine contemporary issues in three places: the Los Angeles River, downtown Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California neighborhood. We will consider how change in these places (and representations of this change in media) reflect more broadly on Los Angeles and the American dream.

Course objectives

- To understand key places, events, and topics in the history and geography of Los Angeles.
- To understand the social, environmental, and economic conflicts inherent in everyday Los Angeles.
- To think critically about how the city is experienced and represented.

¹ Please use proper email etiquette when contacting me at this address. Also, please include "GEOG 100" in the subject line. Failure to include this will result in a delayed response.

Required texts

Carey McWilliams: *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (1973 reprint of 1946 book)

D.J. Waldie: *Where We are Now: Notes from Los Angeles* (2004)

Course reader available at: Magic Machine (University Village)

You must read the assigned readings *before* your weekly discussion section or the class date for which they are assigned, whichever comes first.

Course schedule

Part I: History of Los Angeles

August 24 Introduction to geography and Los Angeles

Cullen, J. "Introduction," In *The American Dream: A short history of an idea that shaped a nation*. (Available on Blackboard)

August 26 Geography of Los Angeles

McWilliams: "Introduction," vii – xxi.

Waldie: "Preface: Where I am," 13-24.

August 31 Climate and vegetation

Didion, J. 1968. "from Slouching Towards Bethlehem." In *Unfolding Beauty: Celebrating California's Landscapes*.

McWilliams: "South of Tehachapi," 3-20.

September 2 Natural hazards: Fire, flood & earthquake

Davis, M. 1998. "The Dialectic of Ordinary Disaster." In *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*.

McPhee, J. 1979. "Los Angeles Against the Mountains." In *The Control of Nature*.

Waldie: "For all its Faults," 171-174.

September 9 ****Map quiz****

September 9 Settling and claiming California

McWilliams: "The Indian in the Closet," 21-48.

McWilliams: "Californios and Mexicanos," 49-69.

September 14 Boomtown & boosters

McWilliams: "The Folklore of Climatology" and "Years of the Boom," 96-137.

Waldie: "Et in Arcadia, Ego," 78-83.

September 16 Identity, exclusion, and unrest in 20th-century Los Angeles

American Experience: Zoot Suit Riots (PBS website; explore, including "Timeline" and "Film Description"): <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/index.html>

Stevens, E. W. "1965: Year of change," from *Radical L.A.: From Coxey's Army to the Watts riots, 1894-1965*. (Blackboard)

September 21 Water

McWilliams: "Water! Water! Water!," 183-204.

Waldie: "The Golden Dream Goes Dark," 71-73.

September 23 Sprawl

Dreier, P. "Introduction," In Wolch et al. *Up Against the Sprawl*. (Blackboard)

Waldie: "Closing the Suburban Frontier," 38-41.

Waldie: "My Place in California," 47-50.

Waldie: "Knowing your Place," 106-108.

Waldie: "Metal and Flesh," and "On the Bus," 128-145.

Waldie: "Our Town," 146-153.

September 28 Landscapes of Los Angeles

Banham, R. *Los Angeles: Architecture of the four ecologies* (excerpt)

Dear, M. "Rediscovering Rayner Banham's Los Angeles."

September 30 The stories we tell about Los Angeles

Hayden, D. "Invisible Los Angelenos" In *The Power of Place*.

Waldie: "Gone Hollywood," 42-46.

Isherwood, C. "from Exhumations," In *Unfolding Beauty*

Bukowski, C. "we ain't got no money, honey, but we got rain," In *Unfolding Beauty*

October 5 Review

October 7 *****Midterm*****

Part II: Issues in contemporary Los Angeles

Los Angeles River

October 12 Geography of the Los Angeles River

Price, J. 2005. "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in L.A." In *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*.

Gumprecht, B. 1999. "The river as it once was." In *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*.

October 14 Controlling the river

Gumprecht, B. 2005. "Who killed the Los Angeles River." In *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*.

October 19 The river today

KCET Departures: L.A. River. http://kcet.org/local/departures/la_river/

October 21 Regreening the river?

Friend, T. "River of Angels," In *The New Yorker*.

Waldie: "The City and the River," 51-70.

Gottlieb, R. 2007. "Re-envisioning the Los Angeles River." In *Reinventing Los Angeles: Nature and Community in the Global City*.

October 26 Debating the future of the river (class activity)

Pincetl, S. The Los Angeles River: Restoration, (Re)Invention? The Politics of Nature in L.A. (blog) available at: <http://www.ioe.ucla.edu/ucpe/blog/article.asp?parentid=2150>

Remaking downtown

October 28 The geography of downtown Los Angeles

Davis, M. "The infinite game." In *Dead Cities*.

Waldie, "Real City," 109-117.

November 2 Chavez Ravine and Bunker Hill

Parson, D. "Old town, lost town, shabby town, crook town": Bunker Hill and the modern cityscape" In *Making a Better World: Public housing, the Red Scare, and the direction of modern Los Angeles*.

Avila, E. "Suburbanizing the City Center," In *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*.

November 4 Broadway

Roseman & Vigil, "From Broadway to 'Latinoway'" In *Places*.

Waldie, "Catching the Urban Wave," 125-127.

Bringing Back Broadway, City of Los Angeles, www.bringingbackbroadway.com

November 11 Skid Row and Main Street

Davis, M. "Fortress L.A." (excerpt) In *City of Quartz*.

Blasi, G. "Policing our way out of homelessness," available at: <http://www.bringlahome.org/docs/policingourwayoutofhomelessness.pdf>

November 13 Debating the future of downtown (class activity)

USC and its neighborhood

November 16 History and geography of the USC neighborhood

Roseman et al. "A University and a Neighborhood" (excerpt)

November 18 USC guest speaker

USC Master Plan: <http://www.usc.edu/community/upcmasterplan/>

November 23 SAJE guest speaker

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy: <http://www.saje.net>

November 25

Debating the future of USC (class activity)

In conclusion

November 30 The stories we tell about Los Angeles: Part II

Keil, R. "Los Angeles as Metaphor," In *Unmasking L.A.*

Davis, M. "Sunshine or Noir," (excerpt) In *City of Quartz*.

December 2 Review

December 11 Final exam
(2-4 p.m.)

Course assessment

Los Angeles geography map quiz (Sept. 2) (5%)

Midterm (Oct. 7) (mixed: multiple choice, short answer, 1 essay) (25%)

Final (non-comprehensive) (short answer and essay) (25%) December 11, 2-4 p.m.

Assignment 1 (5%): Rephotography

Assignment 2 (10%): Representations

Assignment 3 (20%): The American Dream

Discussion section (determined by TA): 10%

Grading policy

Late assignments will not be accepted. Assignment 1 will be submitted using **Google MyMaps**. Assignments 2 & 3 will be submitted using **Turnitin** on your lab section's **Blackboard**. Please be sure you understand these technologies before the due date. All sources for these assignments, including Assignment 1, must be acknowledged. For Assignments 2 & 3 MLA or Chicago citations are required. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. For more information about what plagiarism includes, see: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/ug_plag.htm

Only documented medical or family emergencies are acceptable reasons for rescheduling exams or changing assignment due dates. Rescheduled exams will be given in essay format.

Assignments

The goal of these assignments is to focus on a single place in Los Angeles throughout the semester and to use this place to better understand the concepts introduced in class. Think carefully before selecting your location for the first assignment. The following is a list of possible sites in Los Angeles that will be studied in all of your assignments. You may select a different site, but it must first be approved by your TA. You may NOT select USC or any location within five blocks of campus (this includes the Coliseum!). The goal of these assignments is to expand your horizons beyond campus to see other areas in Los Angeles. If you don't have a car, you can travel with someone else studying the same location, or you

can take public transportation. The Los Angeles public transit system is extensive, and we would be happy to help you figure out the appropriate bus or train to reach your destination. As a start, the F-DASH runs in a circle around campus and goes downtown along Flower/Figueroa streets.

Los Angeles places

Broadway (*Blade Runner*)

Bunker Hill (*The Exiles*)

Chavez Ravine/Dodger Stadium (photos by Don Normark)

Hollywood Boulevard ("Celluloid Heroes," or one of many other songs about the street)

Lakewood Center (mall/shopping plaza) (*Holy Land*)

Little Tokyo (Japanese American National Museum)

Los Angeles State Historic Park (Not a Cornfield art project)

Los Angeles River (poetry of Lewis MacAdams)

MacArthur Park (song)

Main Street (*500 Days of Summer*)

Olvera Street (*City of Angeles* — children's book)

Pershing Square (*The Soloist*)

San Fernando Valley (*Chinatown*)

South Central Community Garden (*The Garden* — documentary)

South Central neighborhood (*Killer of Sheep*)

1. Rephotography/ collaborative mapping:

Take a photo of yourself in a place that is also in a historic photo you find online. It would be helpful to travel with someone to this photo site so you can take each other's photos there. Digital cameras can be taken out of the library. A photo from a camera phone should also work. However, the focus of the photo is on the landscape, not on you! Photos must then be

posted on a collaborative Google MyMap of Los Angeles, with a paragraph on how the location has visibly changed over time. More information will be provided at least two weeks before the assignment is due. **Due Oct. 10th**

Sources for photographs:

Los Angeles Public Library

http://catalog1.lapl.org/cgi-bin/cw_cgi?getLimitedTerms+24996

Los Angeles Times

<http://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/dlib/lat/search.cfm>

University of Southern California

<http://digarc.usc.edu/search/controller/index.htm>

Calisphere

<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/>

American Memory Project

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

2. Representations of Los Angeles

Choose a media representation of Los Angeles that involves the site you selected for the last assignment. This could include a novel, poem, documentary, feature film, or song. For the purposes of this assignment, representations will NOT include newspaper articles (Suggestions will be provided, but creativity is encouraged). Write a 3-4 page essay that describes your site, how it is represented, and what this representation says about the author's point of view (Specific questions will be provided). More information will be provided at least two weeks before the assignment is due. **Due Nov 11th**

3. Final essay: Los Angeles and the American Dream.

This 4-6 page essay will describe the history of your site, how it has changed over time, and how it reflects agreement and/or conflict over what constitutes the "American dream." How does your new knowledge about the history of the region affect your (re)interpretation of the landscape? Photos, maps (hand-drawn is fine) and other supplementary materials are encouraged. I also encourage you to draw from (but don't copy) your previous assignments in this essay. Outside research using books, newspaper articles and primary sources is required. More information will be provided at least two weeks before the assignment is due.

Due Dec 2

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 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. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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. The student guidebook contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

If you unsure how to cite the work of others to avoid accusations of plagiarism, visit this website: http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/student-conduct/ug_plag.htm and/or the student writing center. Ignorance of the rules governing original work and citation guidelines is not an acceptable excuse for plagiarism.

Multimedia in the Core program

You have the option to take a 2-credit lab in video production and media theory (IML 140) alongside this course. The 2-unit course is designed for students interested in creating a short film catering to their interests in geography. The class will focus on a critical engagement with media and will provide hands-on experience with multimedia authorship, production and editing in state-of-the-art labs on campus. Some of the projects produced will count toward final project grades in GEOG 100.