

COMM 360: The Rhetoric of Los Angeles

Spring 2013: Monday/Wednesday, 10 - 11:50 am, G34

Professor Vincent Brook

Office Hours: M/W 9 – 9:50 am, ASC 333

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Yaanga, Yang-na, Yabit, El Pueblo Nuestra Senora de la Reina de Los Angeles del Rio Porciuncula, City of Angels, City of Chaos, Sunshine City, Sin City, City of Desire, City of Dreams, City of Quartz, City of Blight, Bright and Guilty Place, The White Spot, La La Land, City of the Future, City of Forgetting, City of Lies, Equivocal City, Enormous Village, Chamelion Metropolis, Postmodern Metropolis Par Excellence . . . Los Angeles has been called all these things and more—out of pride, envy, hype, hubris, fear, denial, love, disgust, mis- and in-comprehension.

Following the trajectory my book, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles*, the course will exhume the many faces, facets, and feces of Los Angeles by looking at the Indian-village-turned-multicultural-megalopolis through the prism of a palimpsest—that is, the geographical and historical layers of Los Angeles will be explored in relation to their vast, complex and often contradictory discursive constructions (in literature, film, television, architecture, music, politics, etc.).

The course is divided into four main parts. Part 1 examines the early written histories of Los Angeles, from the imagined community's origins as a Tongva Indian settlement to its emergence as a major American metropolis in the early 20th century. Part 2 intersects LA's history with that of Hollywood, which as geographical site and generic term for the culture industry is itself an uncanny combination of reality and myth. Part 3 deals with film noir, the darkly seductive movie genre, many of whose canonical texts are set in LA and/or feature the City of Heaven/Hell as a main character. Part 4 explores the demographic diversity of Los Angeles—specifically, the histories and media representations of the Latina/o, African American, Asian American, and Anglo/White communities—thereby re-visioning LA's history from an ethno-racial perspective and bringing us into the multicultural present.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Vincent Brook, *Land of Smoke and Mirrors: A Cultural History of Los Angeles* (2013)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS:

American Quarterly (Fall 2004): Special Issue on Los Angeles

Jeremiah Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles*

Reyner Banham: *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*

Howard Blum, *American Lightning: Terror, Mystery, the Birth of Hollywood, and the Crime of the Century*

John Buntin, *LA Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City*

Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*

Michael J. Dear, H. Eric Schockman, and Greg Hise, eds., *Rethinking Los Angeles*

Dydia DeLyser, *Ramona Memories*

William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*

William Deverell and Greg Hise, ed., *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*

Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity*

Joe Domanick, *To Protect and to Serve: The LAPD's Century of War in the City of Dreams*

William Estrada, *The Los Angeles Plaza: Sacred and Contested Space*

Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*

David Fine, *Imagining Los Angeles*

- David Fine, ed., *Los Angeles in Fiction: A Collection of Essays*
- Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*
- Robert M. Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930*
- William Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles*
- Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles*
- Darnell Hunt and Ana-Christina Ramon, *Black Los Angeles: American Dreams and Racial Realities*
- Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: And the Making of Modern Politics*
- Norman M. Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory*
- Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds., *20th Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict*
- “L.A. Palimpsest: Recovering Los Angeles’ Hidden Stories and Forgotten Communities”
(www.scrippscollege.edu/.../la-palimpsest-recovering-los-angeles-hidden-stories-and-forgotten-communities)
- Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place*
- William McCawley, *The First Angelenos: The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles*
- William Alexander McClung, *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles*
- Kevin R. McNamara, *The Literature of Los Angeles*
- Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island in the Land*
- Enrique and Gilda Ochoa, eds., *Latino LA: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*
- Johnny Otis, *Upside Your Head: Rhythm and Blues on Central Ave.*
- Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios, A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890*
- Louise Pubols, *The Father of All: The de la Guerra Family, Power, and Patriarchy in Mexican California*
- Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*
- Richard Rayner, *A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder, Corruption, and Los Angeles’s Scandalous Coming of Age*
- David Reid, ed., *Sex, Death, and God in L.A.*
- David Rieff, *Los Angeles: Capital of the Third World*
- Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio*
- George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity and Culture in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*
- Deepak Narang Sawhney, ed., *Unmasking L.A.: Third Worlds and the City*
- Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*
- Alain Silver and James Ursini, *L.A. Noir: The City as Character*
- Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-Imagined Places*
- Kevin Starr, Multi-volume series on California
- Bruce Torrance, *Hollywood: The First 100 Years*
- Jules Tygiel, *Oil, Stocks, Scandal During the Roaring Twenties*
- David L. Ulin, ed., *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*
- Victor M. Valle and Rudolfo Torres, *Latino Metropolis*
- Max Vorspan and Lloyd Gartner, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles*
- D.J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*
- Roger Waldinger and Mehdi Bozorgheimer, eds., *Ethnic Los Angeles*
- John D. Weaver, *Los Angeles: The Enormous Village*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- All assignments must be completed to receive a grade in the class.
- Late papers or assignments will be graded down 1/3 grade for the first late day, and an additional 1/3 grade for every subsequent two late days.
- Good attendance and punctuality are expected. Absences not only affect your class participation grade but can affect your overall grade as well. 10 or more unexcused absences results in an automatic Fail. Leaving the class early also factors into attendance.
- Class participation is encouraged, and can affect your grade positively (see Evaluation).
- Cheating on exams or plagiarism in writing assignments are grounds for failing the class.

EVALUATION:

Term Paper: 25%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam (non-cumulative): 25%

Group Site Visit Project: 15% (written and oral presentation; guidelines below)

[Or Alternative—JEP Project: 15% plus Extra Credit; guidelines below]

Class Participation: 10%

GRADING:

97-100% = A+, 93-96% = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, etc.

SCHEDULE AND AGENDA

(Readings/screenings subject to change)

WEEK 1Mon., Jan. 14

Introduction, The Origins of Los Angeles

Screening: TBA

Reading: None

Wed., Jan. 16

Origins (continued)

Reading: Brook, Prologue and Introduction

Screening: *Ramona* (1910)**WEEK 2**Mon., Jan. 21**MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY—NO CLASS**Wed., Jan. 23

Hollywood

Reading: Brook, Ch. 1

Screening: *Ramona* (1936, Part 1)**WEEK 3**Mon., Jan. 28

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 2

Screening: *Ramona* (1936, Part 2)Wed., Jan. 30

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 3

Screening: Documentary on Hollywood

WEEK 4Mon., Feb. 4

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 3 (continued)

Screening: *What Price Hollywood?* (Part 1)Wed., Feb. 6

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 4

Screening: *What Price Hollywood?* (Part 2)

WEEK 5Mon., Feb. 11

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Banham (Handout)

Screening: *The Player* (Part 1)Wed., Feb. 13

Hollywood (continued)

Reading: Dear (Handout)

Screening: *The Player* (Part 2)**WEEK 6**Mon., Feb. 18**NO CLASS—PRESIDENT’S DAY**Wed., Feb. 20

LA noir

Reading: Brook, Ch. 5

Screening: Documentary on Film Noir

WEEK 7Mon., Feb. 25

LA noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 5 (continued)

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 1)Wed., Feb. 27

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 5 (continued)

Screening: *Double Indemnity* (Part 2)**WEEK 8**Mon., March 4

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6

Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 1)Wed., March 6

Reading: None

LA Neo-noir (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 6 (continued)

Screening: *Chinatown* (Part 2)**WEEK 9**Mon., March 11**WRITTEN PROJECTS DUE!****PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (Part 1)**Wed., March 13**GROUP PROJECT PRESENTATIONS (Part 2)**

Handout: Study Guide for Midterm

WEEK 10Mon., March 18**NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK**Wed., March 20**NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK****WEEK 11**Mon., March 25

Review for Midterm

Reading: None

Screening: *LA Story* (Excerpt)Wed., March 27**MIDTERM EXAM****WEEK 12**Mon., April 1

LAtinas/os

Reading: Brook, Ch. 7

Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 1)Wed., April 3

LAtinas/os (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 7 (continued)

Screening: *Mi Familia* (Part 2)**WEEK 13**Mon., April 8

bLAcks

Reading: Brook, Ch. 8

Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 1)Wed., April 10

bLAcks (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 8 (continued)

Screening: *Boyz N the Hood* (Part 2)**WEEK 14**Mon., April 15

LA and Asians

Reading: Brook, Ch. 9

Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part 1)Wed., April 17

LAsians (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 9 (continued)

Screening: *Better Luck Tomorrow* (Part 2)**WEEK 15**Mon., April 22

LA and Whites

Reading: Brook, Ch. 10

Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 1)

Wed., April 24

LA and Whites (continued)

Reading: Brook, Ch. 10 (continued)

Screening: *Falling Down* (Part 2)

WEEK 16

Mon., April 29

Review

Reading: Conclusion

Screening: Documentary *Inventing Los Angeles* (Part 1)

Wed., May 1

Review

Reading: None

Screening: Documentary *Inventing Los Angeles* (Part 2)

Handout: Final Exam Study Guide

TERM PAPERS DUE!

WEEK 17

Mon., May 6

NO CLASS—STUDY DAYS

Wed., May 8

NO CLASS: STUDY DAY

WEEK 18

Mon., May 13

FINAL EXAM: 8-10 AM!

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Group Site Visit Project: Guidelines

- I. Written project due: Monday of the 9th week. If we have a TA, submit two hard copies: one for the TA and one for the professor.
- II. Length: 5-7 pages typed (double-spaced, default margins, 12-point/Times New Roman font), plus photo(s) verifying you were at the site.
- III. Topic: Research and scope your assigned Los Angeles site.
 - A. Pre-writing:
 - 1) Research the site, so that you know what to look for when you get there.
 - 2) Meet with the TA and/or instructor, to get research and other tips.
 - 3) Visit the site.
 - B. Writing:
 - 1) Describe the site's location, physical characteristics, historical background, rhetorical reputation.
 - 2) If the site is an individual building, group of buildings, or comparatively small space, place it in the context of its larger immediate surroundings (i.e., Griffith Observatory re Griffith Park, Disney Hall re the Music Center and Bunker Hill). If it is a larger space (Boyle Heights, Venice Beach), focus on key locations within the larger one (as pointed out by the instructor).

- 3) Describe your experiential engagement with the site: what is it like to be there, and MOST IMPORTANTLY, how does it mesh with your expectations based on its rhetorical reputation and historical significance? (If individual responses vary, describe them separately.)
- 4) Conclude with an assessment of the site's socio-cultural significance—i.e., What is its relevance to the rhetoric of Los Angeles, historically and contemporarily.
- 5) Group members can write sections individually or together, but all are equally responsible for the finished product.
- 6) Include footnotes/bibliography, using accepted academic methods.

IV. Oral Presentation: Each group makes a brief (10 min.) in-class oral presentation on your site, Mon. or Wed. of the 9th week. Powerpoint or other creative tools are suggested.

V. Cooperation and the equitable distribution of responsibilities with your partner are essential; failure to “get along” potentially hurts both parties.

JEP (Joint Educational Project)—Guidelines

JEP is a Student Service Learning program sponsored by USC's Dornsife School (www.dornsife.usc.edu/jep). JEP provides an opportunity to go into a local public school and work as a mentor or teaching assistant and learn about the neighborhood around USC as well as the city in which you live while earning class credit. Students may work individually or in small teams.

You will receive training sessions and engage in weekly “reflective assignments.” JEP will supervise your participation and provide assessment to your professor. Besides the invaluable experience you will gain and community service you will perform, your grade on the project is equivalent to the On-Site Visit Project assignment, also counts for extra credit, and adds an impressive item to your overall resume.

Further guidelines, including written material, will be provided in class by a JEP representative. For further questions about JEP, contact Jake Peters, JEP's Assistant Director of Academic Affairs at jjpeters@usc.edu or 213-740-1831.

Term Paper Guidelines

I. Due: Wed. of the 16th week. (last regular day of class).

II. If we have a TA, submit two hard copies: one for the TA and one for the professor. Also submit an on-line copy to turnitin.com. Details TBA.

III. Length: 7-10 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font, default margins)

IV. Topic:

A. Choose an aspect from one of the four sections of the course: Early L.A. History; Hollywood; Film Noir/Neo-Noir; Ethno-Racial L.A.

B. Choose a rhetorical text, ideally media (book, film, TV show, music, advertisement, etc.) but you can broaden the concept to include a location or even a sports team. If you choose a film, you may discuss ones used in class, but your FOCUS should be on one

NOT used in class. No two students may choose the same media or rhetorical text: first come, first served.

C. Analyze the aspect and text by applying one or more of the main theoretical frames discussed in class: e.g., palimpsest, whitewashed adobe, booster, debunker, counternarrative, ambivalence, etc., and bring in other concepts as applicable.

D. No matter what aspect(s) you choose, compare the historical record with your text's historical representations or presumptions.

E. Alternative topics/theoretical frames are subject to professor approval.

V. Method:

A. Title Page:

1. Title of essay, with main title and subtitle. The title of the text you are analyzing should appear somewhere in the main or sub-title. Puns are encouraged, e.g.:

**“Having Your Movie and Eating It Too:
Debunking the New Hollywood in *The Player***

2. Name; Course Number; Term

B. Introduction:

1. State your topic: What aspect of the course and what literary/media text will you be focusing on, and what theoretical frame(s) will you be applying?
2. Upon introducing your literary/media text, for a book give the author and date of publication, for a film give the director and release date, for a TV show give the year(s) of its original run. This information can be provided in parentheses; e.g., *The Player* (Robert Altman, 1992).
3. State your thesis: What you will argue or demonstrate through an examination of your text from your particular frame(s).

C. Body:

1. Analyze your text from the perspective of your theoretical frame by:
 - A. Bringing in outside research, which should include pertinent in-class and AT LEAST two outside sources.
 - B. Illustrating your points with passages, images, scenes, etc., in the text.
 - C. Compare the historical record with your text's historical representations and presumptions.
 - D. Explain the significance of what you have discovered to the rhetoric of L.A.
2. Cite sources using one of the approved citation methods (MLA, CMS, APA).

D. Conclusion:

1. Briefly summarize your findings without being redundant.
2. End with a strong statement giving a clear sense of what you have tried to show.

E. Notes or Works Cited section.

VI. Additional Pointers:

- A. Number your pages.
- B. Underline or put in italics all titles (films, books, etc.).
- C. When referring to creators or authors, give the full name the first time they are mentioned, thereafter only the second name: e.g. “**Robert Altman** did thus-and-so. In addition, **Altman** did thus-and-so.”

D. When describing representational **content**, use the present tense: e.g., “In *The Player*, Griffin Mill **represents** a postmodern variant of the venal and corrupt studio executive”; “In this scene, Mill **displays** his moral depravity by **failing** to disclose his involvement in the crime”; “*The Player* **satirizes** the film industry’s continuing sacrifice of art to the bottom line.”

E. To indicate films’ historical relations, however, use the past tense: e.g., “*The Player* **was** the first mainstream U.S. film in decades to critique the Hollywood system”; “*The Player* **launched** a new trend in anti-Hollywood films.”

F. No plot summaries! Plot information should only be used to support the thematic points of your paper.

G. No plagiarism! This will result in an automatic Fail for the assignment and, depending on the egregiousness, for the class as well.

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Some (Not Necessarily All) LA Films/TV Shows

Hollywood (some may overlap w/film noir):

The Bad and the Beautiful, Barton Fink, Be Cool, The Big Knife, The Big Picture, Boogie Nights, Bowfinger, The Day of the Locust, Ed Wood, Get Shorty, Hollywoodland, The Last Tycoon, Mulholland Drive, SImOne, Singin’ in the Rain, A Star is Born (1937, 1954, 1976), SOB, Swingers, The Truman Show, What Just Happened

Film Noir/Neo-Noir:

Ask the Dust, Bad Influence, The Big Sleep, The Big Lebowski, The Black Dahlia, Blood In Blood Out (Latino), Boulevard Nights (also Latino), Brick, The Changeling, Collateral, Colors, Crash, Criss Cross (1949), Dead Again, Devil in a Blue Dress (also Black), Die Hard, Down in the Valley, Drive, End of Watch (Multicultural), Farewell My Lovely, Friday (Black), The Grifters, Heat, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Kiss Me a Killer (also Latino), Kiss Me Deadly, Jackie Brown (also Black), Juice (Black), LA Confidential, Lady in the Lake, LessThan Zero, The Limey, Magnolia, Memento, Mildred Pierce, Mulholland Drive, Mulholland Falls, Murder My Sweet, Play It As It Lays, Point Blank, The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946, 1981), South Central (also Black), Strange Days, To Live and Die in LA, Training Day, True Confessions, The Two Jakes, Union Station

Miscellaneous:

American Me (Latino), Annie Hall (NY/LA), A Better Life (Latino), Beverly Hills Cop (Black/White), Big Wednesday (Surfurbia), Born in East LA (Latino), Bread and Roses (Latino), Celeste and Jesse Forever, Charlotte Sometimes (Asian), Clueless (Foothills), A Day Without a Mexican (Latino), The Debut (Filipino), Don’t Be a Menace While Drinking Juice in the Hood (Black), Down and Out in Beverly Hills, Dragnet, Earth Girls Are Easy, Echo Park, Escape from LA, Exiles (American Indian), Fast and Furious (Mixed Race), Fast Times at Ridemont High (Valley), (500) Days of Summer (Downtown), Fletch, Friday, Gang Tapes (Black), Grease, Havoc (White/Latino), The Kids Are All Right (lesbian), Killer of Sheep (Black), I Love You, Man (White), La Bamba (Latino), Less Than Zero (White), Los Angeles Plays Itself (documentary), The Loved One, Menace to Society (Black), Mi Vida Loca (Latino), Punch Drunk Love (San Fernando Valley), Quinceanera (Latino, gay), Real Women Have Curves (Latino), Rebel Without a Cause, Repo Man, Ruby Sparks, Short Cuts, Slums of Beverly Hills, Soul Food (Black), Speed, Stand and Deliver (Latino), They Live!, Tortilla Soup (Latino), To Sleep with

Anger (Black), Valentines Day, Valley Girl, Volcano, Who Framed Roger Rabbit, Zoot Suit (Latino)

TV Shows:

American Family (Latino), Arrested Development, Beverly Hills 90210 (either or both versions), Californication, Curb Your Enthusiasm, Dragnet, Entourage (Hollywood), Episodes (Hollywood), Flashforward, The George Lopez Show (Latino), The Larry Sanders Show (Hollywood), L.A. Complex (Hollywood), Melrose Place (either or both versions), Mildred Pierce, Modern Family (multicultural), NCIS Los Angeles, Numb3rs, The O.C., Resurrection Blvd. (Latino), 77 Sunset Strip, Soul Food (Black), Southland, The Shield, Weeds(also Black)