

# LOS ANGELES STORIES: GESM 120 (35379)/Category B

4 units/Fall 2024 M/W 3:30-4:50pm/DMC 202\*\*  
Instructor: Dr. Chris Freeman (cefreema@usc.edu)  
Office: M/W 10-11:30 and by appointment (THH 410)



## **Course Description**

“Los Angeles Stories” is a course intended to develop your critical thinking and writing skills as well as your discussion skills. To that end, you will be encouraged to keep a journal; you will write several formal papers, and you will actively participate in our daily discussions. You will also do a brief presentation (with a partner) during the semester on a topic related to LA history and culture. We will be exploring images of Los Angeles in various forms over the past 80 years. We’ll be reading fiction and nonfiction, and we will be watching several films to help us understand the many versions of Los Angeles (its history, culture, mythologies, terrain, etc.) at play in representations of our fair city. LA has a long and complex genealogy, and we will cover as many aspects of its past and present as we can.

## **Humanistic Inquiry Category**

“Los Angeles Stories” is an investigation into life in LA, from the story of an aspiring young Italian American writer, to the story of a Black World War II shipyard worker, to the stories of three young Latino high school seniors in East LA trying to make their way into college. The struggle to make it in a place that seduces and disappoints is a human struggle. The course material explores how we learn what we need to know; how we balance ambition, dreaming, and hard work; how we handle disappointment and tragedy; how we explore the ethics of life in urban American, where radically different groups of people live in close

proximity, sometimes with hostile, complex histories. The course includes discussions and readings about race and racism; about empathy and apathy; about dreams and nightmares; about Malibu and Compton. How the city has grown, how it positioned itself as a major destination; how art and commerce have shaped the city we live in. Through analysis and engagement with novels, poetry, song lyrics, videos, documentary, and historical texts, “Los Angeles Stories” provides students with a wide-ranging, diverse, and engaging curriculum, allowing them to imagine and understand the processes through which Los Angeles has emerged from an outpost of the Wild West to the vibrant, rich canvas that it is in the 21st century.

### **Learning Goals**

This course will help you understand the complex culture of your new home. You will read some important texts—fiction, nonfiction, poetry—and watch films and other videos to see how LA has changed over the past century; how it has exported images of itself; how it has melted down and rebuilt; how it has become a leading, global 21st century metropolis. Your writing skills will be challenged and honed in the essay assignments; your reading and discussion skills will expand in a seminar/conversation format; your speaking and communication skills will be polished in presentations and in-class discussions; and your critical thinking skills will expand through involvement with our texts and how they fit into the narratives of LA and US history and culture.

- You will write two essays (1200-1500 words each) with prompts drawn from our readings/viewings in which you analyze your topic relationship to LA history and culture and situate it into your understanding of how LA has changed in the past; this will likely involved linking LA history to US history;
- You will work with a partner to collaborate on a presentation and essay on a significant topic from this history (for example, the 1984 Olympic Games) to demonstrate how your topic figures in to the history of the city; how it relates to the issues our course is concerned with; you will select and describe these elements of your topic. You will design a concise, clear PowerPoint/Prezi and present that to the group, and you will write a research-based essay (1200-1800 words) on a salient aspect of your topic, to be turned in one week from your presentation date;

### **The Contract**

In accepting this syllabus and becoming a member of this class, each student agrees to complete all assignments in a timely and serious fashion. You also affirm your commitment to the exploration of ideas in the liberal arts tradition, an exploration which is intellectual, creative, and respectful of others in the classroom. In class, you will engage with the material, pay attention, to make comments and ask questions, to listen to your classmates, and to learn. This is a basic requirement for you to receive credit for participating in the class; merely showing up isn’t sufficient. Your commitment to the quality and integrity of your work during the semester means that all work you hand in will be your own; *any*

*outside sources will be properly cited; and your work will be of the highest quality that you can produce. Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. It will have severe ramifications, and I will spot-check anything suspicious to ensure against it. If you have any questions about using outside sources, please ask me to help you.*

As the instructor, my commitment to each student is that I have put considerable thought into developing this course; that I will work hard to invigorate and challenge you during the semester; that I will read your work carefully and with an open mind and will value it accordingly; that I will be prepared for class but that my agenda won't get in the way of your input; and that I will be available to help you in your writing and thinking about the texts and issues we will be exploring. I'm here to help you succeed, to adjust to life at USC, and to help you strengthen your reading, writing, and discussion skills.

**Regarding CHAT GPT/AI, etc:** from Dean Richard Fliegel: *The use of AI is on everyone's mind, and there are several ongoing discussions about what to allow or prohibit. Two important ideas should be made explicit on the syllabus or the first day. Using an AI generator when it is not explicitly permitted should count as plagiarism; and students are responsible for whatever they turn in, including AI's false citations. From me: do not turn in work using these tools, period. They violate the intellectual integrity of our classroom and its goals/intentions.*

ZOOM Recordings Intellectual Property and Privacy Ownership: *SCampus Section 11.12(B): Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).*

**TRIGGER WARNING: Given the volatility of the subject matter of the course and the circumstances that our work will often confront, please be aware that some of what we read, view, and discuss will be difficult, emotionally and otherwise, to handle, for all of us. Let's be sensitive to that in our seminar—we will always be respectful; we will always assume best intentions and best efforts at civil discourse. If something you are reading or viewing is too upsetting, SKIP IT and talk to me about alternatives and other strategies.**

## Readings and Supplementary Materials

- Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945; Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002): PDF on Brightspace
  - D. J. Waldie, *Holy Land* (Norton, 1996, 2005): paperback or Kindle
  - Christopher Isherwood, *A Single Man* (FSG or Minnesota; 1964; 2001): paperback or Kindle
  - Steph Cha, *Your House Will Pay* (Ecco, 2019): paperback, Kindle app, or Audible.com
  - Dana Johnson, *In the Not Quite Dark* (Counterpoint, 2016); Kindle or paperback
- Films likely will include *Boyz 'N the Hood* (Singleton, 1991); *Straight Outta Compton* (Gray, 2015); *Boys in Peril* (Streeter, 2012); *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Q. Tarantino, 2019); and *Tom Bradley: Bridging the Divide* (Goldfarb, 2015)

## Grading

- Short “introduce yourself” essay (800 words): 50 points
- Essays One and Two (1200-1500 words): 200 points x 2
- Research Project/Presentation/paper (pairs; 15 minute presentation; 1200-1500 word essay due a week later): 300 points
- Take-Home Final Exam Essay (1200-1500 words, due Dec 16 by 4pm): 150 points
- Class Participation/engagement/professionalism 100 points\*

Essay one and two topics will be of your own invention, drawn from suggested topics/prompts from our readings and discussions. I'd suggest one “literary” topic and one “exploration/location” topic for the two main essays. The research project will team you up with a partner and will involve a 12-15 minute presentation and an essay (1200-1500 words) based on your presentation; you have about 15 topics to choose from with rolling deadlines. We will have two-on-one conferences to set up and help you and your partner develop these presentations.

\*NOTE: After your THIRD absence, you will forfeit all 100 class participation points. **Class participation includes showing up on time, doing the reading, paying attention, contributing to the conversation, and professional demeanor.**

A: 930-1000; A-: 929-895; B+: 894-870; B: 869-830; B-: 829-795; C+: 794-770, etc.

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### **Schedule of Assignments (subject to change as needed)**

#### **Part One: World War II Era/Race and Place: 1940s & 50s LA**

“Driving in the middle of a foreign city, it hit him that he had arrived in Los Angeles without any assurance of anything.”—Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*

##### Week One

M, 8/26: Introduction to the course; Old and new LA; LA myths and truths; “Live and Learn” essay from the *New Yorker* by Louis Menand on the purpose of college education

W, 8/28: “Lost LA”: season two, episode three, “Building the Metropolis” (25 minutes); begin Himes (ch 1 and 2); **Discuss self-introduction essay, due via Turnitin on Sept 12<sup>th</sup> by 5pm**

##### Week Two

M, 9/2: Labor Day; no class; keep reading Himes

W, 9/4: MEETING VIA ZOOM TODAY; continue Himes; choose projects; discuss excerpts from Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (Brightspace) and poems/videos on Black life in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century

##### Week Three

M, 9/9: continue in Himes; Kris Bowers documentary; discuss self-introduction essays; make presentation choices

W, 9/11: Lost LA visitors and assignment; finish Himes; **self-introduction essay due 9/12 by 5pm**; 9/13: last drop/add day and last day for P/NP

#### **Part Two: Post-War Expansion & Growing Pains**

“In a suburb that is not exactly middle class, the necessary illusion is predictability.”—DJ Waldie, *Holy Land*

##### Week Four

M, 9/16: Waldie, *Holy Land* (SECTIONS to focus on for this book: 1-32; 52-74; 84-94; 113-39; 194-206; 243-75; 284-91; 300-end; these are NOT page number but section numbers, about 60% of the total book); “Lost LA”: season six, episode one: “Fast Food”

W, 9/18: continue Waldie; prompts for essay

Week Five

M, 9/23: finish Waldie, *Holy Land*; writing workshop and discuss essay prompts

W: 9/25: **first presentation: Classic Hollywood**

### **Part Three: Transitional Years—LA in the 60s and 70s**

“Los Angeles weather is the weather of catastrophe, of apocalypse. . . . The wind shows us how close to the edge we are.” –Joan Didion

Week Six

M, 9/30: **presentation: Disney & Disneyland**; begin discussion of Isherwood; watch clips from *Chris & Don: A Love Story*

W, 10/2: continue in *A Single Man*; Isherwood essay and diaries on Brightspace; last day to withdraw with W this week

Week Seven

M, 10/7: **presentation: Chavez Ravine & Dodger Stadium**; discuss essay prompts (due Oct 18th); continue in Isherwood

W, 10/9: continue *Single Man*; read CF’s essay on Isherwood (Brightspace); fall recess 10/10 & 11

Week Eight

M, 10/14: finish Isherwood; **presentation: Watts towers/Watts rebellion**

W, 10/16: Didion, “Los Angeles Notebook” on Brightspace and watch clips about Didion; **presentation: Tarantino’s *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* and Charles Manson; essay due Friday, October 18th on Turnitin (noon)**

Week Nine

M, 10/21: **presentation: surf culture in SoCal; presentation: music scene in SoCal 1960-85**; begin Tom Bradley documentary, *Bridging the Divide*

W, 10/23: **MEETINGS FROM TODAY UNTIL THE END OF THE TERM WILL BE VIA ZOOM**; discuss Tom Bradley documentary

watch either *Boyz n the Hood* or *Straight Outta Compton* and write up discussion on Google Doc by Sunday, 10/27 at 5pm

### **Part Four: Trouble in Paradise: Looking for Contemporary LA**

“Our art is a reflection of our reality.” (Ice Cube)

Week Ten

M, 10/28: discuss *Boyz n the Hood* and watch clips/scenes

W, 10/30: **presentation on the Olympics in Los Angeles**; discuss *Straight Outta Compton* and watch clips/scenes; begin Cha, *Your House Will Pay*

Week Eleven

M, 11/4: **presentation: LA Lakers & LA LIVE**; continue Cha; watch *Love Song for LaTasha* on Netflix (on your own)

11/6: NO CLASS

Week Twelve

M, 11/11: Veterans' Day, no class

W, 11/13: continue in Cha, *Your House Will Pay*; discuss next essay;

**presentation: Art and architecture in LA**

Week Thirteen

M, 11/18: finish Cha; continue in Johnson's stories from *In the Not Quite Dark* (we will read most of these stories); **presentation: LA's depiction in**

**videogames**

W, 11/20: continue in Johnson; **presentation: Skid Row and the housing crisis in LA; turn in essay two via Turnitin by noon Friday, 11/22**

Week Fourteen

M, 11/25: TBD; Thanksgiving

Week Fifteen

M, 12/2: continue in Johnson; watch half of *Boys in Peril* (2012); discuss final exam assignment (due Monday 12/16 by 4pm)

W, 12/4: finish Johnson and finish *Boys in Peril*; wrap up discussion and in class evaluations

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**Final exam & any other written work due Monday, Dec 16 by 4pm**

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#### **Definition of Excellence in Teaching: USC Department of English**

All writing is creative, and all civic engagement requires a sophisticated understanding of discourse and interpretation. The USC Department of English is committed to the power of the story, the word, and the image. We analyze and organize complex ideas, evaluate qualitative information, anticipate how real audiences respond to language, and study behaviors of complex characters leading uncertain lives with competing values. We develop critical abilities for a successful life, but our stories tell us why life is worth living.

Excellence in teaching is an active engagement with these commitments, perspectives, and values. A student with a major in **English** should graduate with an appreciation for (1) the relations between representation and the human soul, and (2) the relations between words and ideas. Teachers will encourage this appreciation through their knowledge and conveyance of the subject, the appropriateness of instructional materials, and the quality of their students' responses. We expect our students to:

- o understand the major representations in English discourse from earliest beginnings to the current moment; all literatures exist in conversation with earlier literatures;
- o organize and interpret evidence;

- o feel the experiences of others, both by engaging in literatures and by their own efforts to create new literatures;
- o understand how periods, cultural intentions, and literary genres differ;
- o grasp the skills and theories of interpretation, and the history of our own discipline;
- o see how interpretive interests shift with time and place;
- o attend to linguistic details of semantics, phrasing, and structure;
- o assume there are reasonable alternative understandings of a text;
- o adjudicate differences through reasoned arguments that honestly engage counter-arguments.

Our students will have lives in very different arenas, but all calling for skills in discourse, empathy, civil argument, and civic engagement. We cannot and should not say what those careers will be; we train students for jobs that have not yet been invented.

English Department students with an interdisciplinary major in **Narrative Studies** should expect instruction that inculcates an appreciation for all of the above, and coordinates with definitions of teaching excellence in USC's corresponding departments.

The Department of English adheres to the modalities of instruction published in the "USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching."

Approved September 18, 2018  
Undergraduate Studies Committee  
Department of English

#### Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

##### Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.



For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

#### Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

#### Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis

services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis. Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)P

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.