

FYSP 193  
Fall 2005  
Tu Th 1:30-2:45  
King 221

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Phone: 775-8583  
OH's: TuTh 10:30-12:00, and by appt.

“Destination: L.A.”

What do you think about when you think about Los Angeles? Do you envision Hollywood starlets and screenwriters parading up and down Rodeo Drive? Do you imagine miles of snarled freeway traffic, smog-red sunsets settling over a chemically hazy skyline, and mindless drones churning out pop-culture piffle? Or, do you picture a city on fire, with entire blocks of East L.A. destroyed, businesses razed, and families displaced, during the aftermath of the Rodney King trial? This course will ask students to consider the various ways in which the “City of Angels” has been imagined, filmed, and written about. Weaving together depictions of L.A. drawn from a wide array of sources (including novels, film, drama, urban studies, ecology, and social science), the class will explore how these differing constructions of Los Angeles reveal critical, unresolved questions about America’s ever-evolving demographic and ever-shifting cultural and social geography. While Los Angeles is certain to evoke different images for different people—a land of opportunity, a disaster waiting to happen, a hot bed of racial strife—the goal of this course is not to determine which image is “correct,” but to understand and appreciate the complexities that go into the making of these images.

**Required Texts:**

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona*  
John Fante, *Ask the Dust*  
Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*  
Chester Himes, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*  
Nathanael West, *Day of the Locust*  
Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*  
Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*

All texts are available at the campus bookstore.

In addition to these required texts, there will also be supplemental readings, which will be posted on Blackboard.

**Course Requirements:**

Attendance:

You are expected to attend every class session, with the exception of three unexcused absences. For every unexcused absence thereafter, your *final* grade will be lowered by *one third*. This means that if you miss class four times, a final grade of B+ will drop to a B; if you miss class five times, a final grade of B+ will drop to B-.

Written Work:

There will be three papers due during the course of the semester.

The first paper (3-4 pages) is due Oct. 18.

- *The first paper will count for 10% of your final grade.*

The second paper (4-5 pages) is due

- *The second paper will count for 15% of your final grade.*

The third paper (5-6 pages) is due

- *The third paper will count for 15% of your final grade.*

The first two papers will require a rough draft, and will go through a rigorous process of peer editing. Peer editing will play an increasingly important role not only in getting you crucial feedback about your paper, but also in allowing you to hone your critical reading and writing skills. Peer edits and rough drafts will be graded.

- *Peer edits will count for 10% of your grade.*
- *Rough drafts will count for 10% of your grade.*

In addition to these three graded papers, there will be a total of 3 shorter assignments due during the course of the semester. These assignments are all listed on the syllabus, and you'll receive a handout about each assignment before it's due. I will also post the assignments on Blackboard.

- *These assignments are designed to help you begin thinking about, and developing, paper topics.*
- *Assignments will count for 5% of your final grade.*
- *All assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will not be accepted.*

All papers and assignments must be typed, double-spaced, in no larger than 12 point font. Papers should be titled, should include page numbers, and should be consistently formatted. Remember to spell check!

*A Note on Plagiarism:* Don't do it. Keep in mind that plagiarism is not limited to someone else's words, but extends to intellectual ideas as well. If you are at all unsure about what is and what is not plagiarism, please don't hesitate to ask.

*Late Paper Policy:* Late papers will be penalized by *one third* of a grade for every full day beyond the original time and due date that the paper is not turned in. This means: if a paper is due on Thursday at the beginning of class, and you turn it in on Monday morning, your grade will drop from a B+ to a C+; if that same paper is turned in on Tuesday morning, your grade will drop to a C. All assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class.

### Student-led Discussion

You (along with a classmate) will be responsible for leading one class discussion during the semester. This format of this discussion is flexible, but consists of two main requirements:

- The focus of the discussion should be relevant to material we're covering in class, and will ideally address and expand upon issues raised in class discussion and your own readings. However, they should not simply repeat what's already been covered in class.
- The discussion should present what you think are the main points of the primary texts that we're covering at the time. However, you can also reference some of the secondary sources that we look at, in relation to the primary texts. The discussion is designed to allow you to present your own take on a particular reading, and to engage in conversation with your classmates about those ideas.
- Each group should meet with me at least once, to discuss possible ideas.

Here are some basic ground-rules for the discussions:

- Discussions should be well thought-out and organized—this means groups should be ready to present cohesive topics and themes that explore the texts beyond surface-level ideas. Plot summaries, vague theories, and generalized opinions will not fly so well for these discussions.
- Discussions should be focused. This means that each group will ideally have organized its discussion around a set of topics or questions that are clear and specific. Random, wandering discussions will be precisely that: random and wandering. I encourage you to avoid this.
- Discussion groups are welcome to assign 'homework' to their classmates beforehand, in order to prepare the class for the discussion's main topics.
- All members of the group should contribute to the presentation, regardless of format.
- Creativity is encouraged, but substance is crucial: ideally, discussions will mix intellectual creativity with academic rigor.

- Needless to say, the success of these discussions depends not only on each group’s level of preparation, but also on the class’s willingness to actively participate. Thus, you’ll be graded on your own discussion *as well as on your participation in others*.
- *Class discussions will be worth 20% of your final grade—10% will be based on your own discussion, 10% will be based on your participation during other discussions.*

Class Participation:

- Your participation in class plays a crucial role in making this class successful. Everyone must participate. For you shy students, this means making a concerted effort to speak up in class, perhaps more than you’d like. I won’t hesitate to call on you, so you might as well preemptively speak. On the flip side, those of you who love to talk should be aware that dominating a discussion sometimes has the same effect as not holding discussion at all. All students should make every effort to facilitate discussion, whether that means speaking up or shutting up.
- Civility is important. This means that disagreements should remain at the level of intellect, and should not involve the effects/affects of personality. This also means, more pragmatically, that you should come to class on time, stay awake in class, stay in class (absenting yourself mid-class without reason or request is highly discouraged; if you need to go somewhere, please ask me first), not eat in class, turn off your cell-phones during class, and a variety of other common-sense things.
- *Class participation is worth 15% of your final grade.*

Oberlin Honor Code:

All work in the class (including, but not limited to, papers, exams, quizzes, and presentations), whether graded or not, is subject to the Oberlin Honor Code. For the full text of the Oberlin Honor Code, direct your web browser to this address:

[http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs05/06honor\\_code.pdf](http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs05/06honor_code.pdf)

Remember to write the Honor Pledge and sign your name at the end of each assignment or paper submitted for credit. The Honor Pledge states: “I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment.”

If you have questions about the Honor Code, don’t hesitate to ask! If you don’t know whether you’re violating the Honor Code, *always ask*—don’t let a simple mistake or misunderstanding jeopardize your grade in the class, or even worse, your record as a student at Oberlin.

**Grade Break-down:**

First paper:	10%
Second paper	15%
Third paper	15%
Peer-edits	10%
Rough-drafts	10%
Assignments	5%
Discussion	20% (10% for your discussion, 10% for participation in others)
Participation	15%

**Course Goals:**

Critical Reading Skills:

One of the primary goals of this course will be to improve the way you read and interpret texts (whether these texts be novels, plays, films, newspaper articles, essays, etc.). You’ll be learning and practicing the skill of “close-reading,” and using that skill to think through your responses and reactions to the texts we encounter. The ability to read critically demands that you learn to distinguish between *what the text says* and *how the text says it*. We’ll be discussing this difference,

along with critical reading concepts and close-reading techniques, throughout the semester, but most intensely during the first few weeks of class.

Critical Writing Skills:

In conjunction with developing your critical reading skills, we'll also be working to improve your ability to write critical papers. As you'll quickly discover, close-reading and critical writing go hand-in-hand; in order to come up with strong arguments for papers you'll need to have strong supporting evidence and clear textual analysis. You'll be learning not only what makes an argument an argument—as opposed to an opinion, a judgment, or a summary—but more importantly, how to arrive at a strong argument through critical reading and writing skills.

Information Literacy:

A third, but related, goal of the course is to improve your ability to find, sift through, organize, synthesize, and cite information. There are many, many ways to use the library's vast resources to improve critical writing and reading skills—one goal of this course is to help discover how *you* might use those resources for the best and most useful results. We'll be visiting the library at least once, and many of the assignments and the final two papers will incorporate research at varying levels.

Exploring “Los Angeles”:

Finally, the fourth goal of the course is to explore the idea of Los Angeles as a site of incredible, and incredibly diverse, cultural production. While many of the texts we're reading are literary in nature, most (if not all) of them have some relationship to history and “real world” events, even if that relation be quite tenuous. We'll use these texts as a jumping-off point to learn about other efforts (filmic, dramatic, ecological, architectural) to contextualize and understand Los Angeles, eventually using your own interests and passions as a point of departure for the final research paper. In the process, we'll introduce concepts of both interdisciplinary study and *intra*-disciplinary study, and begin to build a productive relationship between the two.

**Extended Orientation Schedule:**

In addition to our regular class schedule, there are several important events that are designed introduce you to Oberlin, to help you more effectively manage your time, to take care of yourself, and to meet other people and have fun. I've highlighted these events in the schedule below as an “E.O. Event.”

**Schedule:**

DATE	CLASS SCHEDULE	WHAT'S DUE
Sept. 6	Introduction. Review of syllabus, discussion of course requirements and policies.	
Sept. 8	Introduction, con't, <i>Immigrants, Old and New</i>	
Sept. 11	<b>E.O. Event:</b> "An Oberlin Education and the Meaning of Life"; 7:30 pm, Finney Chapel	
	<b>E.O. Event:</b> Wellness week, "Maximizing the Body, Mind, and Sprit"; Week of Sept. 12, Residence Halls and Wilder Bowl	
<b>Sept. 13</b>	<i>Ramona</i> (first third)	
<b>Sept. 15</b>	<i>Ramona</i> (second third)	Assignment 1
	<b>E.O. Event:</b> Prime Time; Week of Sept. 19, 9:00 pm, Residence Halls	
Sept. 20	<i>Ramona</i> (final third) McClung, "A Usable Past"	Student-led discussion 1
Sept. 22	<i>Ask the Dust</i> (first half)	
<b>Sept. 27</b>	<i>Ask the Dust</i> (second half) Writing Workshop, I	
<b>Sept. 29</b>	Wild, "The Familiarity of 'Foreign Quarters'" Hayden. "Urban Landscape History"	Student-led discussion 2
	<i>Los Angeles at War</i>	
	<b>E.O. Event:</b> Academic Advice; Week of Oct. 3, Residence Halls	
Oct. 4	<i>If He Hollers Let Him Go</i> (first half)	
Oct. 6	<i>If He Hollers Let Him Go</i> (second half) Writing Workshop, II	Rough Draft 1
<b>Oct. 11</b>	Hayden, "Invisible Angelenos" Wild, "Building the White Spot of America"	Student-led discussion 3 Peer edits 1
<b>Oct. 13</b>	NO CLASS Read: <i>Zoot Suit</i> , Mazon	
Oct. 18	<i>Zoot Suit</i> (complete play) Mazon	Student-led discussion 4
Oct. 20	<i>Zoot Suit</i> documentary	Paper 1
	<i>Hollywood!</i>	
<b>Oct. 25</b>	NO CLASS: Fall Recess Read: <i>Day of the Locust</i>	
<b>Oct. 27</b>	NO CLASS: Fall Recess Read: Schmidt, "A City of Self-Made Men" and "Hollywood in the 1940s"	
Nov. 1	<i>Day of the Locust</i> (first half) Writing Workshop, III	Assignment 2
Nov. 3	<i>Day of the Locust</i> (second half) Schmidt essays	Student-led Discussion 5
<b>Nov. 8</b>	<i>Cradle Will Rock</i> screening	Rough Draft 2
<b>Nov. 10</b>	<i>Cradle Will Rock</i> screening Writing workshop, IV	

	<b>April, 1992</b>	
Nov. 15	<i>Twilight, Los Angeles</i> (selections, TBA) <i>Twilight, Los Angeles</i> screening	Peer-edits 2
Nov. 17	Stewart, "Communication between African Americans and Korean Americans..." Navarro, "The South Central Los Angeles Eruption..." Chang, "Race, Class, Conflict and Empowerment..."	Student-led discussion 6
<b>Nov. 22</b>	<i>L.A. is Burning</i> screening	Paper 2
	<b><i>The Future of Los Angeles?</i></b>	
<b>Nov. 24</b>	NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break Read: Reisner, "The Red Queen" and begin <i>Parable of the Sower</i>	
Nov. 29	Reisner, "The Red Queen" <i>Parable of the Sower</i> (first half)	Assignment 3
Dec. 1	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> (second half) Writing workshop, V	
<b>Dec. 6</b>	Davis, "Fortress L.A."	Student-led discussion 7
<b>Dec. 8</b>	Davis, "The Literary Destruction of L.A."	
Dec. 13	Davis, "Beyond Blade Runner" Writing workshop, VI	
Dec. 15	Conclusion	Final Paper Due