

Syllabus

English 550: Reading Los Angeles

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"Tip the world over on its side and everything loose will land in Los Angeles."

— Frank Lloyd Wright

Welcome to English 550. The theme of this graduate seminar on American literature is Los Angeles, specifically multiethnic depictions of Los Angeles, arguably the most mythologized and definitely the most diverse city in the United States. Los Angeles has been mocked as a city 500 miles wide and two inches deep. It is famous for its movies and music, but critics claim that it lacks cultural depth.

This course seeks to prove otherwise.

The region of Southern California has a remarkably rich literary heritage extending deep into its past, and over the past two decades, Los Angeles has become a pre-eminent center of literary creativity in the United States, the home of a new generation of writers whose work address questions and concerns of special significance as we confront the problems of 21st-century urban America including ethnic tension, environmental crisis, social inequality, and problems associated with urban uprootedness and materialism. Our goal is to develop an appreciation for the ways in which authors across races, genders, sexualities, and historical periods have wrestled with (and against) this strange and powerful city.

Required Texts:

- *Day of the Locust* (West 1939)
- *A Single Man* (Isherwood 1964)
- *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* (Deavere Smith 1994)
- *Tropic of Orange* (Yamashita 1997)
- *Little Scarlet* (Mosley 2004)
- *Their Dogs Came with Them* (Viramontes 2007)

Course Requirements:

Weekly Response Papers (30%): To meet the arranged "fifth hour" requirement for this course, students will maintain a reading and reflection journal. Your journal is a place for you to develop ideas, ask questions, try various forms of inquiry, and gather materials to consider and use in your formal essays. Use your informal writing to detangle the meaning of readings, to observe and analyze the many "texts" around you and to develop your thoughts through your reading and in-class discussions. Responses are always due at the same day and time of each week: Fridays no later than 11:00AM. You are to post them to Canvas or bring me a hard copy.

Leading Discussion (20%): Students will have an opportunity to facilitate discussion of the course reading material throughout the quarter. On these days students must come to class with a prepared list of questions (typed) that I will distribute to the rest of the class. I will distribute a sign up sheet for students to choose the days they will be discussion leaders.

In Class Participation/Assignments (10%): Students are expected to be active learners, which means speaking up in discussion, asking questions, responding to questions, and exhibiting consistent and genuine intellectual engagement from week one to final's week. If you feel uncomfortable talking in class, please let me know and I will help you through this handicap (and handicap it is in literature seminars). Please note that this category also encompasses any 'in-class' small group or free writing assignments.

Research Project (40%): Instead of a final exam, students will complete a 15-20 page research paper on the course topic (literary depictions of Los Angeles). Papers are to present, sustain, and defend an argument and must rely on close textual analysis, a consideration of context, and the use of at least five secondary sources. Students will have an opportunity to draft and workshop their essays well before the final revision is due.