

## HIST 129: History of Los Angeles

**Course description:** This course surveys the political, social, and economic history of Los Angeles from its earliest settlement by Native Americans to the present. Topics include environmental issues, urban development, race and ethnicity, the entertainment industry, and the media's portrayal of Los Angeles. Special emphasis is given to the expanding role of Los Angeles as global city that is a destination for diverse immigrant populations and a center of international commerce.

### Required course readings:

Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*

George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*

Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*

E-reader with primary sources and articles (selection from Lynch included here)

### The Project: Mapping the Familiar and the Strange: Working Towards Spatial Justice

Students will do neighborhood cognitive and thick mapping and journals of South Bay neighborhoods and identify—individually and in a group—their neighborhood's strengths and spatial injustices (socio-cultural, built, political, economic, environmental, etc.). Student groups will be formed based on their residential neighborhoods. Based on their investigations, each group will prioritize one strength and one spatial injustice for “alternative futures” proposals and pitch their “alternative futures” proposals to the larger class. After all of the groups have presented to the class, the class will discuss and assess the “alternative futures” proposals with an eye towards sharing those proposals with the broader city.

**Students:** Each group will have 3-5 students based on their shared South Bay neighborhood. Total groups: 6-7.

**Cognitive mapping and journal:** Once placed in a group, each student will do cognitive mapping. Each student will create from memory a neighborhood map that expands from their home 2-4 miles out in different directions and identify the spatial elements (**paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks**) in their neighborhood. They will also note on their maps any known strengths and spatial injustices in their neighborhoods and be mindful of their neighborhood edges and the edges imposed by government (or real estate interests).

The student will then walk, skate, or bike through their neighborhood and keep a detailed field journal (written, video, photo, interviews on the street, drawings, etc.) of those excursions. Some questions for the journal: What colors do you see? Smells? What are homes like? Buildings? What are people doing? How/why did you select your edges? What five spatial elements are present as you write your journal entry? How do those spatial elements shape what people are doing? Not doing? What neighborhood strengths and spatial injustices do you see? What is the history of the area you are describing?

The way to approach each journal entry is to ask yourself, “is it complete?” You might think about your journal entries by asking, “How can I make the strange familiar and the familiar strange?” Or, “what are you seeing in new ways?” The tone of the journal should be that of an engaged researcher. **Be sure to answer all the questions for every entry for your field journal.**

At least 3 journal entries should be done in week 1 with the goal of capturing as much of your neighborhood as possible, keeping in mind how well your cognitive map squared with what you found in your journal entries.

**Group work:** Student groups will meet to share their cognitive mapping process and general findings from the field journals. Then, the group will focus on the strengths and spatial injustices in their neighborhood. After hearing all reports, the group will decide which strengths and spatial injustices stand out and why? From this

discussion, select one spatial injustice and one strength. To prepare for your class presentation, discuss the following:

- 1) Your class presentation should focus on what your neighborhood's top spatial injustice is and why you selected it. Describe your "alternative future" proposal to address that injustice and how we can collectively get there.
- 2) Your class presentation should focus on what the neighborhood strength is and why you selected it. Describe how this strength might contribute an "alternative future" proposal for neighborhoods across Los Angeles and how you would share that strength with people in other neighborhoods.

**IMPORTANT:** For implementing your "alternative futures proposals," ask yourselves, who will be needed and how will it happen?

**Group Class Presentation:** Each group presents and covers the following questions.

- 1) What neighborhood did you cover? (show class a map) (1 minute)
- 2) Present a group cognitive map with the five basic spatial elements (paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks) for your neighborhood? How did the group process influence, or not, your final map? (5 minutes)
- 3) How did your journal research compare and contrast with your group cognitive map? (5 minutes)
- 4) Present the top neighborhood strength, why it is so great, and how this strength might be an "alternative future" if applied to other Los Angeles neighborhoods? (3-5 minutes)
- 5) Present the top spatial injustice, why your group selected it, the "alternative future" to address this injustice, and how it might be applied to Los Angeles? (3-5 minutes)
- 6) Q and A

**Deliverables:**

**Individual:** a journal and cognitive mapping of neighborhood that identifies a neighborhood's paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. That map will also list the neighborhood's strengths and spatial injustices (socio-cultural, built, political, economic, environmental, etc.).

**Group:** Group discussion of individual findings from their neighborhood, including the strengths and spatial injustices from the neighborhood. Group members identify the top spatial injustice and strength and begin thinking about creative ways of either addressing the spatial injustices or spreading the strength to the rest of the city. Prepare group presentation.

**Group class presentations:** Groups do their presentations and discuss "alternative futures." Group turns in presentation/materials; individuals turn in their cognitive maps and journals.

**Class action:** next steps for pursuing the "alternative futures" for spatial justice....

**Deadlines:**

Week 1: Discuss project as a class, assemble groups, group discussions about assignment, Q and A.

Week 2: Students bring journal and materials for group discussion. Discuss the historical, cultural, and economic landscapes of different neighborhoods in relation to the paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks. Group prioritization process will select one spatial injustice and one strength from neighborhood to highlight in group presentation.

Week 3: Coordinate and work on group presentation.

Week 4: Deliver group class presentations and discussion of "alternative futures."

**Evaluative rubric:** Was the journal and cognitive mapping complete? Were the group presentations and alternative futures proposals thoughtful and creative?