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American Cultures Innovation in Teaching: 'A History of Race and Ethnicity in Western North America,' Teaching Materials

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/11401839>

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Publication Date

2016-05-09

Peer reviewed



**2016
AC Innovation in
TEACHING AWARD**

JUSTIN GOMER

ETHNIC STUDIES 10AC

*A HISTORY OF RACE AND
ETHNICITY IN WESTERN
NORTH AMERICA*





the american cultures center

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

May 2016

The American Cultures Innovation in Teaching Award

This *Innovation in Teaching Award* recognizes the use of pedagogical developments to enhance the students' learning experience in the American Cultures (AC) classroom and the standard of excellence in scholarship, fitting with the core intention of the requirement - to create promote the understanding of race, ethnicity and culture in a comparative and integrative fashion. In addition, faculty who receive this award have created original, cutting-edge teaching plans that enhance both the goals of the AC Requirement and students' learning in the classroom.

JUSTIN GOMER, Ethnic Studies 10AC, 'A History of Race and Ethnicity in Western North America'

Professor Gomer has taught Ethnic Studies 10AC through an interdisciplinary account of significant moments in the history of California. In this course, he addresses the question of what exactly "American Culture" is by exhaustively interrogating terms such as "America," "culture," "race," and "ethnicity." Students are asked to think about connections across histories, across genre, and beyond disciplines in pursuit of a nuanced view of the history of racial formation in California. His course engages students to think about current issues and inject as many voices as possible to ensure that one voice does not dominate the discussion. Through an assemblage of primary texts, songs, poems, and quotes from artists and intellectuals of color, theoretical concepts and social histories are given strong and creative voice.

American Cultures Innovation in Teaching Award,
2016 Ethnic Studies 10AC – Fall 2014

I. Overview

The innovation in my approach to teaching American Cultures courses has little to do with introducing cutting edge technology in the classroom. Instead, in my view my innovation lies pedagogically through the manner in which I model interdisciplinary inquiry of American culture.

My version of Ethnic Studies 10AC—the introductory course in the Ethnic Studies Department—explores the role of race and ethnicity in the history of California. It is through the lens of racial formation theory that we examine the history of California.

Rather than offer a continuous narrative, the course provides an episodic and interdisciplinary account of significant moments in the state’s history. These episodes begin with a detailed the history of Native Americans, missions, Chinese immigration, and Rancheros/Californios in what became California. We then move to the World War II period where we focus on Japanese internment, the Second Great Migration, and the centrality of race in the rise of Hollywood. Thirdly, we will explore the Western film genre as well as the ways in which the Western has shaped Native American racial ideology and served as a site to contest, challenge, and remake Native American identity.

From there we explore how the federal government encouraged and subsidized white supremacy and racial discrimination economically through postwar suburbanization and the blight of the cities the process left behind. Weekly topics in this unit include freeways, Disneyland, Dodger Stadium, West Oakland, and the Black Power Movement. We then turned to more contemporary representations of Chinese-American identity in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Our final two units dealt with prisons and race in Hollywood in the 21st century, respectively.

I have taught the course three times over the past year and a half. Once in the Fall semester of 2014, again in the Summer of 2015 and lastly as part of the Summer Bridge Program in 2015.

II. Distinct Claims of Innovation

This course moved beyond a multidisciplinary approach to American culture in pursuit of a truly interdisciplinary learning experience. While often conflated, the distinction between multi- and inter-disciplinarity is paramount, especially in the study of race, ethnicity, and culture. Disciplines have historically played a significant role in the creation of hierarchy in America. It was, to take one example, Sociologists that did much of the heavy lifting in constructing an ideology of urban blackness defined as lazy and pathological in the 1960s. And it was a Political Scientist that pushed his assertions that blacks were inherently less intelligent than whites in the 1990s. The construction of knowledge through traditional disciplines, in other words, has played an integral role in the construction of white supremacy throughout American history.

A multidisciplinary approach aims to address these power dynamics, but insufficiently, in my view. On the one hand, a multidisciplinary pedagogy counters the power dynamics of traditional disciplines by looking beyond the artificial boundaries disciplines place on knowledge and research; yet, it does so by inserting another discipline or two. Multidisciplinary is therefore ultimately still vulnerable to the disciplinary politics it seeks to deconstruct.

Interdisciplinary, on the other hand, explores knowledge through the active deconstruction of disciplinary boundaries. It rejects all requirements of disciplinarity in the construction of knowledge that is democratic and socially just.

That begins, in my ES 10AC course, by asking different questions. The AC is in the course title stands for “American Cultures,” but what do those terms even mean and to whom? We begin with interrogating terms in order to understand what’s at stake in how we define key terms.

Once terms like “America,” “culture,” “race,” “ethnicity,” are exhaustively interrogated, the course proceeds to demand students think about connections across histories, across genre, and beyond disciplines in pursuit of a more nuanced view of the history of racial formation in California. What, for example, is the relationship between the freeways of Los Angeles, the work of Chicano artists in the City of Angels, the Boyle Heights neighborhood, and Dodger Stadium? How does listening to Nina Simone help us understand the Black Power Movement, or CA Proposition 14?

Lastly, my course aims to inject as many voices as possible into the course. I constantly foreground my own subject-position—that of a white heterosexual male teaching about race. In order to ensure that my voice does not dominate discussion or take on too much authority I assign a multitude of primary texts, virtually all of which written by people of color. Additionally, lectures are filled with songs, poems, and quotes from artists and intellectuals of color in order to give voice to the theoretical concepts and social histories we discuss.

III. Influence On Student Learning

Students learn to think critically and interdisciplinarily in my course. They learn how to read films, novels, and songs as historical documents. They learn how to examine the “work” of popular culture and its role in the larger process of racial formation and its effect on policy, law, and politics. They learn to make connections that seem unlikely—between, for example, Orange County and Watts, Disneyland and Black Independent Film.

As student feedback and evaluations make clear, students found this class innovative in many ways. For students, it offered them a space, perhaps for the first time at UC Berkeley or even in their educational journey, in which experiences typically placed at the margins, if not entirely silenced, were centered. There was no black or Latino month in our course. The experiences of California’s multi-racial citizenry was the focus of our course. Moreover, the class allowed them to think about ways in which racial inequality and white supremacy is manifest, not simply through personal animus but in freeway construction, suburbanization, etc.

Discussion section reinforced the emphasis on giving voice to the histories we discussed. Students were encouraged to translate theory and make sense of readings through their own

experiences, however similar or foreign. They, in other words, weighed the California lives discussed in class with their own California life.

The most significant day of the course in the Fall of 2014 occurred late in the semester in the wake of nation-wide protests around the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, MO. I threw out the day's lecture and invited students to talk about what was on their mind. The range of responses—some frustrated, some tearful, some enraged, others confused—attested to both the safe-space we had collectively constructed which enabled students to speak so honestly, as well as the how the theoretical and historical content of the course was providing a more critical lens through which students could make sense of the events unfolding in Ferguson. To hear a student cry because he was so angry, yet also express that anger by articulating the connection between the history of suburbanization, the rise of the prison industrial complex, and the events in Ferguson, was more than I could have hoped for.

Ultimately, I seek to innovate in my classes in order to create a classroom that offers a safe space for critical inquiry that resonates with lived experience. On that day, we achieved that goal.

Ethnic Studies 10AC

A History of Race and Ethnicity in Western North America

Professor: Dr. Justin Gomer
Email: JGomer@berkeley.edu
Office: 268 Evans
Office Hours: Tuesday 12-1:30pm
Thursday 11-12:30pm

Lectures: Tuesday and Thursday
9:30-11am
A1 Hearst Annex

Screenings: select Tuesdays 6pm, 60 Barrows

Course Website: <https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1254427>

Graduate Student Instructors

Charisse Burden-Stelly
cburdens@berkeley.edu

Matthew Horton
match@berkeley.edu

Section Information

Monday 3-4p, 101 Barrows (Horton)
Tuesday 12-1p, 105 Latimer (Burden-Stelly)
Wednesday 4-5p, 185 Barrows (Horton)
Friday 11-12p, 242 Dwinelle (Burden-Stelly)

Course Description

This course explores the role of race and ethnicity in the history of what became the Western United States, focusing on California. Racial formation theory provides the bedrock for this course. It is through the lens of racial formation theory that we will examine the history of California.

Rather than offer a continuous narrative, this course provides an episodic and interdisciplinary account of significant moments in the state's history. The nineteenth century social history of the state serves as the first episode. Here we will cover in detail the history of Native Americans, missions, Chinese immigration, and Rancheros/Californios in what became California. We then move to the World War II period where we focus on Japanese internment, the Second Great Migration, and the centrality of race in the rise of Hollywood. Thirdly, we will explore the Western film genre as well as the ways in which the Western has shaped Native American racial ideology and served as a site to contest, challenge, and remake Native American identity.

From there we will look at how the federal government encouraged and subsidized white supremacy and racial discrimination economically through postwar suburbanization and the blight of the cities the process left behind. Weekly topics in this unit include freeways, Disneyland, Dodger Stadium, West Oakland, and the Black Power Movement. Subsequently, we will look at more contemporary Chinese-American identity in San Francisco's Chinatown. Our final two units deal with prisons and race in Hollywood in the 21st century, respectively.

Lastly, this course provides an introduction to interdisciplinary scholarship and research methods. Students are expected to think beyond merely social history to the ways in which popular culture, economic and public policy, to name a few, actively shaped the history of California.

Technology in the classroom: *This class is a "low-tech" zone; therefore, laptops and cell phones are not allowed in class.*

Course Requirements, Grades, & Assignments

Attendance & Participation (20%): Attendance at lectures and discussion section is mandatory. Moreover, each student must actively participate in this course. That means both showing up to class having completed all of the assigned readings and watched the assigned film (if applicable) *and* contributing to the day's discussion.

Paper (20%): Students are required to write a paper that is 6-8 pages in length. The paper is due in class on Thursday November 20th. Further details about each paper will be provided as their respective deadline approaches. Late papers will be docked ½ letter grade each day after the assignment is due.

Midterm Exam (25%): The midterm will consist of a combination of identifications, short answers and essays and will take place on October 14th. Students must bring a Green Book to the exam.

Final Exam (35%): The final exam is comprehensive. Like the midterm will consist of a combination of identifications, short answers and essays. The final exam will be held on Tuesday, December 16th from 3-6pm. Students must bring a Green Book to the exam.

Grades are calculated using the following scale:

A+ 98-100	B+ 88-89	C+ 78-79	D+ 68-69	F 0-59
A 93-97	B 83-87	C 73-77	D 63-67	
A- 90-92	B- 80-82	C- 70-72	D- 60-62	

Required Books

Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*

Chester Himes, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go*

Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*

Luis J. Rodriguez, *Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*

*Additional readings are posted on course website (<https://bcourses.berkeley.edu/courses/1254427>).

All books are available for purchase at Eastwind Books of Berkeley, 2066 University Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94704. Books are also on reserve at both the Moffitt and Ethnic Studies Libraries.

Required Films

Stagecoach – John Ford (1939)

Killer of Sheep – Charles Burnett (1977)

Chan is Missing – Wayne Wang (1982)

Smoke Signals – Chris Eyre (1998)

Crash – Paul Haggis (2004)

*Screenings will take place on the Tuesday the week each film is assigned. While screenings are not required, students are strongly encouraged to attend and must watch the film by Thursday of each week. All of these films are also available at the Media Resource Center (MRC).

University Resources and Policies

University Writing Resources

“The SLC (Student Learning Center) Writing Program works under the assumption that all writers, regardless of their experience and abilities, benefit from informed, individualized, and personal feedback on their writing. The program is staffed by professional staff and trained peer tutors who work with writers engaged in any stage of the writing process - from brainstorming paper topics, to formulating and organizing arguments, to developing editing skills. While tutors will not "proofread" students' papers, they will help students learn to address issues of style, syntax, grammar and usage in their writing. Tutors are trained to work with non-native speaker of English and with writers from a variety of disciplines.” For more information visit <http://slc.berkeley.edu/writing/>

Disabilities Accomodation

Students with disabilities that affect their ability to participate fully in class or to meet all course requirements are encouraged to bring this to the professor's attention so that appropriate accommodations can be arranged. Further information is available from the Disabled Students' Program website at <http://dsp.berkeley.edu>

Academic Misconduct and Plagiarism

According to the Berkeley Campus Code of Conduct, "Plagiarism includes use of intellectual material produced by another person without acknowledging its source." Furthermore, "All persons engaged in research at the University are responsible for adhering to the highest standards of intellectual honesty and integrity in research. Integrity in research includes not just the avoidance of wrongdoing, but also the rigor, carefulness, and accountability that are hallmarks of good scholarship. University policies set high standards of ethical behavior for faculty and students involved in research and provide procedures for addressing allegations of misconduct in research. Misconduct means fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those commonly accepted within the scholarly and scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. Misconduct does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data." This statement is available at the website on official campus policies and procedures at <http://campuspol.chance.berkeley.edu/index.cfm> under the keyword "plagiarism." **Any instance of plagiarism will result in a course grade of "F" and a report to the Office of Student Conduct.**

Syllabus

**Note: All readings must be completed before your section on the week they are listed.
Readings are subject to change.*

Week 1: Course Introduction

8/28: Course Introduction

Part I: Race and California in the 19th Century

Week 2: 19th Century California, part I

9/2: Race & Ethnicity: theoretical foundations

9/4: Native Americans in CA

Reading: Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, Chapters 1-6

Week 3: 19th Century CA, part II

9/9: Californios & Mexicanos

9/11: Chinese Americans in CA

Reading: Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, Chapters 7-10, 12 & 13

Part II: World War II and The Western

Week 4: World War II

9/16: Internment

9/18: Oakland in World War II

Reading: Himes, *If He Hollers...*, Chapters 1-11

Week 5: Hooray for Hollywood!

9/23: Hollywood lecture

9/25: Himes Discussion

Reading: Himes, *If He Hollers...*, Chapters 12-22

Week 6: The Western

9/30: Guest Lecture by Dr. Michael Cohen, Professor of African American & American Studies
-Screening: *Stagecoach* (dir. John Ford, 1939)
10/2: *Stagecoach* Discussion
Reading: Tag Gallagher, "John Ford's Indians;" Richard Slotkin, "The Significance of the Frontier Myth in American History"

Week 7: Smoke Signals

10/7: Smoke Signals Lecture
-Screening: *Smoke Signals* (dir. Eyre, 1998)
10/9: Smoke Signals Discussion
Reading: Sherman Alexie, "Dear John Wayne"

Week 8: Midterm Exam

10/14: **Midterm Exam**
*BRING A GREEN BOOK!
10/16: No Class

Part III: White Flight and Urban Blight—The Rise of the Postwar Suburb

Week 9: The Suburbs

10/21: The Rise of the Suburbs
10/23: Disneyland
Reading: Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight*, Chapters 1 & 2

Week 10: Freeways

10/28: Dodger Stadium
10/30: Freeways
Reading: Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, Chapter 15; Avila, *Folklore of the Freeway*, Chapters 4 & 5

Week 11: The Black Panther Party

11/4: Black Panthers Lecture
- Screening: *Killer of Sheep* (dir. Charles Burnett)
11/16: Discussion: *Killer of Sheep*; *Chan is Missing* Lecture
Reading: Ng, *Bone* Chapters 1-7; Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, Chapters 16-17

Part IV: Race in the Age of Neoliberalism

Week 12: Chan is Missing/ Bone

11/11: No Class
*There is no screening for *Chan is Missing*. The film is available online at
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EhgSui0V_qY
11/13: Discussion: *Chan is Missing/Bone*
Reading: Ng, *Bone*, Chapters 8-14

Week 13: Prisons

11/18: Prisons lecture
11/20: **PAPER DUE in class**
Guest Lecture, Christopher Petrella, Ph.D. Candidate, African American Studies, UCB
Reading: Rodriguez, *Always Running*, Introduction & Chapters 1-4

Week 14: Gangs

11/25: *Always Running*... Discussion

11/27: No Class – Happy Thanksgiving!

Reading: Rodriguez, *Always Running*, Chapters 5-Epilogue

Week 15: Hollywood in the 21st Century

12/2: Always Running Discussion

-Screening: *Crash* (Haggis, 2004)

12/4: *Crash* discussion/Final exam review

****Final Exam: Tuesday, December 16th from 3-6pm. Location TBA****