

CALIFORNIA POLITICAL GEOGRAPHIES

Geography 50AC

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Spring 2013
MWF 2-3pm
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COURSE INTRODUCTION

“Westward the course of empire takes its way,” wrote George Berkeley, the Irish bishop, philosopher, and namesake of the first University of California. Penned in 1726, Berkeley was in the midst of raising funds for a small college in Bermuda, where he hoped to educate and convert American “savages” (in his words) to Christianity and enlightened thought – it was in the British colonies, not, as Berkeley felt, morally decayed Europe, where he placed hopes for the future of civilization. In 1905, a trustee of the University of California (est. 1868) suggested the name “Berkeley” for the then farming community which surrounded the college, linking the little town with broader historical and geographical projects of conquest and empire, nation-building and race-making, and even the cultural politics of education with which Berkeley himself was engaged.

The central task of our course is to understand the multiple histories and broad geographies that make up what we have come to know and experience as “California.” As befits Berkeley’s hopes for the West, the state has long been a powerful player in the world economy and the spectrum of national politics: the birthplace of the anti-tax movement and Black Power, home to one of the most productive industrial (and exploitative) agricultural regions in the world and at the center of multiple alternative food movements today. Even as the state’s GDP ranks eighth among countries in the world, California is not quite “the golden state” for all who live within its political borders. It contains great concentrations of both wealth and poverty: places like Silicon Valley and Hollywood, on the one hand, and Stockton (which led the country in foreclosure rates in 2008) and Vallejo (which declared bankruptcy in the same year), on the other. It makes sense that a place with such uneven political geographies would also be home to the highest and lowest points of elevation in the contiguous U.S. (Mt. Whitney and Death Valley, respectively), which in fact sit next to each other, in the east-central part of the state. With such fascinating and varied political, cultural, and physical landscapes, California provides an excellent space through which to explore classic and emerging themes in human geography.

Geographers study the relations of nature and culture, space and power, and the dynamics between physical and social landscapes. At the start of the course we will explore some of the key questions and concepts of the discipline, and through them examine environmental and social transformations during California's period as a frontier space and fledgling state. For the remainder of the course we will build on these concepts and themes, focusing on postwar California and with the goal of understanding the histories and geographies of some of today's pressing social and environmental problems: the crisis of public education, widening economic inequalities and housing foreclosures, climate change, food politics, and environmental racism, among them. Throughout the course we will situate California within broader historical forces shaping American life in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries – much as the university trustee, in 1905, situated the small town within a broader imperial project which was, at the time, shaping lives and landscapes across the globe. As we make our way through readings and discussions, students will be encouraged to think critically about themselves as social actors, and the ways their own biographies link up with course content and themes.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Students will be evaluated based on three papers, a final exam, and attendance in both lecture and section. Assignment guidelines and rubrics will be handed out in class.

Personal Essay and Map Project (10%), due February 13th

Field Trip and Essay Project (20%), due March 20th

Final Project – Research Paper or Creative Project (30%), due May 8th

Final Exam (20%)

Section and lecture attendance (20%)

REQUIRED TEXTS

A course reader will be available at Vick's Copies, on the corner of Hearst and Euclid. Two required books (*Under the Feet of Jesus*, by Helena Viramontes, and *Holy Land*, by D. J. Waldie) will be available at University Press Books, at 2430 Bancroft Way.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 – January 23-25 – Introductions

Website: “Invisible 1-5” < <http://www.invisible5.org/>> *Take a audio tour of at least three communities on the website (they are 3-4 minutes each).*

Week 2 – January 28-Feb 1 – Ways of Seeing

Solnit, Rebecca. 2010. “The Geography of the Unseen” and “On the Inexhaustibility of the City.” In *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, plus maps.

Solnit, Rebecca. 1994. *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 215-308.

I. Assembling California

Week 3 – February 4-8 – The Trouble with Wilderness

<http://knottedline.com/>

Please view this website for guest lecture by artist Evan Bissell on Monday, Feb 4th.

Solnit, Rebecca. 1994. *Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Landscape Wars of the American West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 309-389

In class film, *Alcatraz is Not an Island* (Fortier, 2002), 60 min.

Week 4 – February 11-15 – Race and Racisms in Colonial California

**** Personal Essay and Map Project Due February 13th, in lecture

Almaguer, Tomas. 1994. “The True Significance of the Word White.” In *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 45-74.

Takaki, Ronald. “The Heathen Chinees” In *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th Century America*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 215-240

Week 6 – February 20-22 – Water Politics

(Monday Feb 18 is a holiday)

Reiser, Marc. 1986. “A Semidesert with a Desert Heat” and “The Country of Illusions,” In *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*. New York: Penguin Books, 1-51.

McWilliams, Carey. 1946. "Water! Water! Water!" In *Southern California County: An Island in the Land*. New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 183-204.

Didion, Joan. 1979. "Holy Water." In *The White Album*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Week 7 – February 25-March 1 – WWII and The Great Migration

Jelly-Schapiro, Joshua. 2010. "Shipyards and Sounds" In *Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 57-65.

Maya Angelou. 1969. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. New York: Ballantine Books. Selections.

Wilkerson, Isabel. 2010 *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Vintage Books. Selections.

II. The Postwar City

Week 8 – March 4-8 – White Flight, Urban Sprawl, and the Cultural Politics of Suburbs

Waldie, D. J. 1996. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

In Class Film: *Chavez Ravine* (Bullfrog Films, 2004), 24 min.

Week 9 – March 11-15 – Postwar Oakland, Black Power, and the anti-tax revolt

Self, Robert. 2003. "Opportunity Politics" and "Black Power." In *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 177-255.

In Class Film, *Take This Hammer* (KQED, 1964).

Week 10 – March 18-22 – Rodney King and the L.A. Riots

******Field Trip Assignment Due March 20th, in lecture**

Readings TBA.

In class film *The Garden* (selections)

Spring Break March 25-29 – Have Fun!

III. Environmental Politics

Week 11- April 1-5 – Food Justice and Farm labor in the Central Valley

****** Proposal for Final Project Due in Section**

Harrison, Jill, 2011. “The Crop Protection Industry.” In *Pesticide Drift and the Pursuit of Environmental Justice*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brown, Sandy and Christy Getz. 2011. “Farmworker Food Insecurity and the Production of Hunger in California.” In Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman (eds) *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. MIT Press, 121-144.

Perkins, Tracy and Julie Sze. 2011 “Images From the Central Valley”. In *Boom: A Journal of California* Spring 1 (1). Online at:

<http://www.boomcalifornia.com/2011/03/images-from-the-central-valley/>
-and-

Perkins, Tracy. “Voices From The Valley” (photo exhibit)

<http://www.voicesfromthevalley.org/>

(click on “photos”)

Week 12 – April 8-12 – The Geography of Foreclosures [Interlude]

(Lecture on Monday, April 8th only – Wednesday and Friday are days to work on your research project!)

Walker, Richard. 2010. “The Golden State Adrift” In *New Left Review* 66 Nov/Dec, 5-30.

Week 13 – April 15-19 – Environmentalism and Environmental Justice

****** First Draft of Final Project Due in Section**

Viramontes, Helena Maria. *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Penguin, 1-90

Week 14 – April 22-26 – Toxic Geographies

Viramontes, Helena Maria. *Under the Feet of Jesus*. Penguin pp. 91-finish.

Cole, Luke, and Sheila Foster. 2001. “Kettleman City”. In *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 1-9

Leslie, Jacques. 2010. “What’s Killing the Babies of Kettleman City?” In *Mother Jones*, July/August.

Week 15 – April 29-May 3 – Urban Agriculture

McClintock, Nathan. 2011. “From Industrial Garden to Food Desert: Demarcated Devaluation in the Flatlands of Oakland, California. In Alison Alkon and Julian Agyeman (eds) *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*. MIT Press.

Alkon, Alison Hope. 2007. “Growing Resistance: Food, Culture and the Mo’ Better Foods Farmer’s Market. *Gastronomica*. Summer, 93-99.

Guthman, Julie. 2008. “Bringing Good Food to Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice.” *Cultural Geographies* (15): 431-447.

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Final Projects due: May 8th (Reading Week)

Final TBA (Week of May 13th)