

American Studies 395: California Cultures  
Spring 2006

Dr. Sharon Sekhon

\*e-mail: [sesekhon@yahoo.com](mailto:sesekhon@yahoo.com), [ssekhon@fullerton.edu](mailto:ssekhon@fullerton.edu)

phone (message only): 714 - 278 - 2441

Office Hours: Mondays, 5:00 p.m. – 7: 00 p.m.

Office Location: TBA

\*best to contact me via e-mail.

**Introduction:** American Studies 395 is designed to satisfy General Education requirements for Section III.C.2. (Implications, Explorations, and Participatory Experience in the Social Sciences). By carefully developing an interdisciplinary social scientific understanding of the interaction of California's cultures in the past and present, students in AMST 395 will achieve the following General Education goals:

- To understand broad, unifying themes in the social sciences from cross-disciplinary perspectives.
- To solve complex problems that require social scientific reasoning.
- To relate the social sciences to significant social problems or to other related disciplines.
- To apply disciplinary concepts from the social sciences in a variety of settings, such as community-based learning sites and activities.

AMST 395 is also designed to meet the General Education requirements for Section V (Cultural Diversity). Towards this end, students in this class will also achieve the following General Education goals:

- To understand that culture is socially constructed and fundamental to social interaction.
- To appreciate the complex relationships that gender, ethnicity and class bring to a discussion of society and culture.
- To understand that because we live in an inter-connected world, we need to understand the diversity and relationships within and among cultures.
- To recognize and evaluate how one's cultural history affects sense of self and our relationship to others.

Towards this end, this course will use an historical approach, beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and progressing towards the present. We will be investigating the role of history and memory in creating California Cultures and focusing on the twentieth century.

Students of AMST 395 will:

- Develop a rigorous concept of culture and cultural processes as experienced by a diverse group of Californians;
- Understand how various cultures, including Native American, European, Latino, Asian, and African-American, have interacted in California's past and present;
- Gain a broader interdisciplinary awareness, becoming aware of connections among the social sciences and the humanities;
- Acquire a thorough understanding of cultural diversity by examining the creative tension between unity and multiplicity in California experiences, theories of cultural pluralism, and the relationships between subcultures and dominant cultures;
- Understand the ways in which culture creates meaning and guides behavior by learning to critically analyze and interpret a spectrum of California artifacts, ranging from popular to elite expressions;
- Learn research, writing, and expressive skills that will allow them to see connections among complex materials and will enable them to clearly communicate their understanding of the underlying meanings and causes of cultural/historical events within our state.

**Required Readings:**

Donald Ritchie. *Doing Oral History*. (2002).

Nina Revoyr. *Southland*. (2003)

John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*. (1939)

(The required books are available at the Little Professor Bookstore and on Closed Reserve in the Library for checking out for short periods of time for reading.)

**Course Requirements:** It is essential to complete the assigned readings as they come up for discussion. I look forward to spirited and informed discussions of our common readings. In terms of written work, each student will be required to write *two 5-7 page papers, one oral history project, one presentation related to your project, and a final essay exam.*

**Papers:** The first paper, due **March 13**, will examine the novel and the film *The Grapes of Wrath*. The second paper, due **April 17**, will focus on Nina Revoyr's novel *Southland*. A specific writing prompt will be handed out three weeks before each paper is due, and I encourage you to discuss these topics with me as your papers are developing. I expect your turned in papers to be typed and properly documented with a Works Cited or Bibliography, if applicable.

**Final Exam:** Every student will also write a final essay exam covering the entire course, based on identification terms from class and essay questions. This in-class, two hour exam will give you the opportunity to integrate ideas and materials studied throughout the semester. I will provide sample exam questions a week beforehand.

**Oral History Project:** Each student is required to complete an oral history of someone born before 1960. As part of completing this interview, a set of proposed questions for your interview is required. These questions should include a focus on the role, if any, in the development of the interviewee's life, in addition to the roles of work, play, and education. **These questions are due March 6 at the beginning of class.** In addition to the proposed questions, students must conduct and record the oral history on either a standard 60 minute cassette or digitally on CD rom or DVD. **The cassette or cd of the oral history, with its signed permission form, is due April 10.** Finally, students are required to turn in a chronological index of the oral history. Each part is worth 10 points making the entire Oral History Project worth a cumulative 30 percentage points of your semester grade. **The index is due April 24.**

**Presentation:** At the end of the course, each student will present an oral presentation summarizing his/her Oral History Project. Presentations should last 7-10 minutes and **will begin the week of May 1.**

**Grading:** Your final grade will be based upon the following:

First 5-7 page paper:	20% of the semester grade
Second 5-7 page paper:	20% of the semester grade
Oral History Project	30% of the semester grade (10 for proposed questions, 10 for cassette or CD of oral history + signed permission form, 10 for index)
Presentation	10% of the semester grade
Final exam (in-class essay)	20% of the semester grade

These papers, the oral history project and presentation, and the exam will assess your ability to understand, critique, and analyze primary and secondary documents; to synthesize complex ideas from a variety of sources; and to organize brief and extended essays grounded in evidence that also express your individual viewpoint. These assignments (as well as the oral presentation) are designed to enhance your communications skills by providing the opportunity to integrate and analyze class materials and create informed and thoughtful arguments both in discussion and in writing. Your written work must demonstrate an understanding of and familiarity with all relevant course materials, including assigned readings, lectures, multimedia materials, and discussions. All work must be turned in type written, free of spelling and grammatical errors, typed in either a 10 or 12 point font, and documents should have margins no larger than 1 inch in width.

I greatly encourage open, informed, and respectful discussion, and the oral reports are a vital element of the course. It is crucial that you attend every class meeting; frequent absences will hurt your grade. I will accept late papers, but they will be lowered one grade for each day they are late.

**Academic Dishonesty:** It is assumed that you will do your own work. Plagiarism, the appropriation of the words of others without attribution, will not be tolerated. When you use the ideas of another author, you must cite your source. When you use the words of another author, you must use quotation marks as well as cite your source. The penalty for an act of "literary theft" will range from an F on the assignment in question to an F in the course. The University's policy on "Academic Dishonesty" can be found in UPS 300.021 (<http://senate.fullerton.edu/>) as well as in the current CSUF Catalog (2001-2003) on page 484.

**Weekly Lecture & Reading Schedule:**

January 30 Introduction to Course and 19<sup>th</sup> Century California

Reading: Introduction to Ritchie & 3 Pass Guide to Critical Reading (attached to the syllabus).

February 6 A Culmination of Cultures, 1848 and the White-washing of California History

Reading: Steinbeck, first third (Chapters 1-10)

February 13 Whose California? The Great Depression, Repatriation and Beyond

Reading: Steinbeck, second third (Chapters 11-20)

February 20 Culture as Politics/Politics as Culture

**Monday University Holiday No Class**

Reading: Steinbeck, finish (Chapters 21-30)

February 27 The Wars of California

Reading: Ritchie, Chapters 1-3.

March 6 Re-aligning History/California As Center but Whose California and Where?

**Proposed Questions for Oral History due at the beginning of class.**

March 13 Hollywood and the Making of the Los Angeles Anti-Myth

**\*Paper 1 due at the beginning of class.**

March 20 Recovering the Un“documented”- History, Sources, and Memory

Reading: Ritchie, Chapters 4 - 6.

March 27: SPRING BREAK

April 3 Lost Voices and Repeating Paradigms: Southern California in Focus

Reading: Revoyr, first half.

April 10 Youth Movements and California History

**Oral History cassette or CD + permission form due at the beginning of class.**

Reading: Revoyr, finish.

April 17 Culture as Politics/Politics as Culture

**\*Paper 2 Due April at the beginning of class.**

April 24 Politics as Politics

Reading: Ritchie, finish.

**Index for oral history is due at the beginning of class.**

May 1

**Project Presentations**

May 8

**Project Presentations**

May 15 **Project Presentations**

May 18 Review for Final Exam.

Week of May 20: Final examination. Be sure to bring a large blue book and a dark pen to write with. Those wishing to know their grade may provide a self-addressed stamped envelope.

### **The 3-Pass Guide to Critical Reading.**

excerpted from Clark, Irene L. *The Genre of Argument*. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998).

This exercise is intended to sharpen your *active* reading skills. When people are inexperienced with published works, they often approach them passively—they simply begin reading to understand the meaning of the text. The problem with this approach is that it adheres to a submissive, rather than to a “take-charge” model of the reading process. Reading submissively implies that a work exists as a separate, valid, believable entity, worthy of serious consideration simply because it has been published. Moreover, the submissive approach does not include the reader-initiated activities of reflecting on the subject and context of the work, questioning the motives, agendas, and qualifications of its author, or evaluating the quality of the argument. Using the 3 Pass Method will better prepare you to critically approach a text.

#### **First Pass: Reflection and Quick Overview**

Reading a published work is something like entering an ongoing conversation. As a student who is being asked to develop a thoughtful position on a complex topic, you must be aware that most of the controversies you encounter in print have been going on for some time. But it is difficult to enter a conversation that started before you arrived—and you have to listen carefully first to figure out what it’s all about. You can make the process of figuring out a written conversation easier for yourself by paying close attention to clues from the text that will help you to make an informed judgment. The first pass over a published work involves assessing what you already know about the subject matter, the context, and the author, and then examining the easily detectable surface clues that the work provides. In first examining a work, you should ask yourself the following questions.

What do I already know about this topic? Have I been brought up to have an opinion on this topic? Have I heard discussions on this topic or read anything about it? Is there a controversy associated with this topic?

What is the context of the controversy about this topic? Is there some action or policy associated with it? Was it written in response to another piece of writing? For whom is this work being written? Do I know anything about any groups associated with this controversy?

What do I know about the writer of the book or article? Does the text provide information about the writer? Does the author have a title or position that would indicate his or her qualifications on a particular agenda? Can I speculate on what the motive of the author might be?

Can I gain additional insight from any immediately available clues, such as publishing information (title, type of publication, copyright date, other works cited in the bibliography) and organizational clues (section headings, boldfaced subtitles, chapter headings, and table of contents?)

#### **Second Pass: Reading for Meaning and Structure**

During the second pass, you should read the material through reasonably quickly and write a summary of it so that you can refer back to it without having to reread it. The summary should give the overall point, as well as recording supporting points so that even a reader who has not read the article will understand what it’s about. Also be sure to take down the publishing information so that you will be able to find the article or book again, and include the information in a works cited page if you decide to refer to it in your writing.

In reading a text for meaning, it is a good idea to focus on its purpose and structure—that is:

Is it a response to another point of view? Can you situate it in a conversation? Is there a controversy associated with it? Does the article or book compare and contrast two or more

ideas or recommendations? Does it make a point about cause and effect? Does it pose a question and then answer it? Does it trace the history of something, structuring its information chronologically? Is it developed through the use of many examples?

### **Third Pass: Interacting with the Text**

Once you understand the meaning and structure of the text, it is time to take charge of your reading, which means reading critically with a questioning attitude toward your material and interacting with it as much as possible. Now is the time for you to enter the conversation, not accepting what you read unless the evidence is convincing. Keep in mind what you have learned about the author's agenda or qualifications for writing this particular article or book, and use that information to formulate critical questions as you read.

Is the argument consistent with what you believe is true or possible about the world and human behavior? Does the main point make sense to you according to your own experience and what you believe is likely to be true? (If it is not, you would then attempt to view the issue from the author's point of view, trying to understand why the author espouses these beliefs.)

Is the argument supported with appropriate and believable subpoints, examples, and facts? Are opinions presented here as if they were facts? Are main points supported with specific, appropriate details and subpoints, or do they consist simply of observations that the author thinks are true? (Remember, unless a writer is an acknowledged expert, you have no reason to accept his or her point of view, and even experts must provide supporting evidence.) What assumptions lie behind the author's position—i.e., what underlying values or statements about the world provide the foundation for the main idea?

Is the evidence reliable? Are the arguments logical? Are there fallacies in the reasoning? Can the authorities referred to be trusted? Do the statements from an authority really substantiate what the author is arguing? Is the authority quoted out of context? (Remember, don't believe everything you read just because an alleged "expert" says something is true. Maintain a skeptical attitude and look for other perspectives on the topic before completely accepting a point of view, especially if it does not seem sensible to you.) Do statistics used as evidence clarify the argument? Do they seem realistic or reliable?

Is the text stylistically trustworthy? Can it assess the quality of the argument based on tone, language, and evidence? Be on the lookout for interpretive words (e.g. ugly, dangerous, bad, elegant, best, etc.); words used for emotional effect (nerd, loser, hippie, democracy, freedom, family); excessive use of abstract rather than concrete language (inadequately defined terms such as "family values" or "work ethic."); ambiguity and distortion.