Out of the Archives, Into the Streets: History, Memory, and Labor Struggle in Los Angeles

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At the turn of the 21st century, working people and their allies transformed the political culture of southern California. Once a stronghold of antiunion employers, and a crucible for the politics of resentment against immigrants and poor people, Los Angeles is now known for its progressive and immigrant-friendly policies. Driving this change forward was a network of service-sector unions and community organizations in collaboration with activist scholars, lawyers, and artists. Together they pioneered new forms of social movement unionism, political engagement, policy research, and political iconography.

Over the past 5 years, UCLA has collected organizational records and oral histories documenting this history including the Justice for Janitors campaign, the struggle of hotel workers, and the work of the L.A. Alliance for a New Economy. In Out of the Archives, Into the Streets we reconnect these documents to the public sphere making them available to present-day Angelenos, and to the world, via the internet. Using these collections students will create:

- Sound and video productions
- Interactive digital timelines, texts, and maps
- Interpretive public displays and/or engagements
- A public event that brings history to our community

Student research and discovery is at the heart of this course. Students must attend all class sessions prepared to discuss readings and engage with fellow students and guests. Students will work individually and in teams to research particular topics and explore the archives for artifacts.

The assigned readings are intended to give you a basic introduction to the context and times we will explore in this class. Because this is a research seminar you will be seeking, finding, and reading things on your own. Expect to read and/or watch/listen to more than is on the syllabus. The class website has links to many primary sources, interviews, videos, and newspaper articles that can help you find your way and open new and interesting questions.

Grade Breakdown

Attendance and Participation: 20%. To do well in this class you must attend class sessions having read the assigned readings carefully and being ready to engage constructively with your fellow students. Missing more than one session will negatively impact your grade. In addition, because we have two class sessions out due to holidays, you are expected to interact with fellow students online during these weeks.
Research Memo: 45%. Each student will prepare a research memo focusing on a particular theme in Los Angeles labor history. The memo will use scholarly interpretations from secondary sources to make sense of particular historical artifacts, and place particular artifacts in a larger context. The format is that of a memorandum rather than a college paper, but the rules of sourcing still apply. Students will submit a draft memo to the professor (10%), a revised memo to be shared with fellow students and the professor (20%), and a final memo to the professor (15%)

Collaborative Contribution: 25%. Students will work in groups to produce publicly accessible interpretations (e.g., timelines, maps, curated texts, or performance). Each student will have a particular role in the work group, and each group will produce a work contract specifying mutual expectations. Groups will submit for evaluation 1) their group’s work contract (specifying what roles each person will take), 2) a project rationale statement, and 3) final project.

Reflection Essay: 10%. Each student will write an essay providing an authentic reflection on their personal experience in the class, the connections and disconnections between this class and others at UCLA and beyond, and what lessons you can take into future endeavors.

Deadlines

- Group Contract: January 30.
- Revised Research Memo: February 27.
- Workshop final projects (including rationale): March 4 (part of participation grade)
- Final (public) presentations: March 11, 1-4 PM
- Final project rationale statements: March 15
- Final Research Memo: March 15
- Reflection: March 15

Course Schedule and Readings

Date | Topic/Reading
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January 7 | **Social Justice Unions on the Cusp of Memory**

Topics:
- Introductions
- The L.A. Labor Upsurge: a brief history
- Library and Archives Research Workshop
- Digital History Techniques: an introduction

Reading:

January 14  
Digging Deeper into L.A. Labor History … and the Archives  
Meet in front of Young Research Library (YRL)

Topics:  
• Deeper into the History of Social Justice Unionism  
• Into the Boxes and Folders  
• Forming Working Groups

Reading:  
• Nelson Lichtenstein, State of the Union, pp. 212-275  
• Karen Brodkin, Making Democracy Matter, 17-42

January 21  
No Class: MLK Day

Meet with your Working Group. Work in the Archives.

Assignment: Selfie in the Archive (post a picture of yourself working in Special Collections to the class discussion board)

Required Viewing:  
• Miguel Contreras: Warrior for Working People: https://vimeo.com/252982823

January 28  
Workers, Unions, and Vernacular Citizenship

Topics  
• Immigrant Workers in L.A. since 1965  
• Unions and Immigrants: a complicated history  
• Immigration politics in the 1990s  
• Crafting working group contracts: Due 1/30
Reading


February 4

Organizing and Mobilizing: Members, Allies, & the Public

Reading

- Jane McAlevey, No Shortcuts, chapter 2
- Chris Zepeda-Millan, Latino Mass Mobilization, chapter 3
- Caitlin Palter, “Hotel Workers Transform the Labor Movement,” Kent Wong, ed., Nonviolence and Social Movements, pp. 87-103

Workshops

- Each student identifies one document, captures a digital copy, and we discuss how to make sense of them.
- Students work with digital tools to create timelines and other resources. We work on research memos.

Draft Research Memo Due: February 6

February 11

Connecting History and Its Publics

Reading:

- Nina Simon, The Art of Relevance: 60-75
- Santana and Pimenta, “Public History and Militant Identities: Brazilian Workers and the Quest for Memory,” ILWCH, (Fall 2009): 65-81
- Karen Brodkin, Making Democracy Matter, chapter 3

Special Guest: Vivian Rothstein, organizer, activist, community historian
February 18  No Class: Presidents’ Day

Each group meets with the professor. Spend time in the archive, reading, and researching.

February 24  Back to the Archives

Revised Research Memo Due: February 26

Meet in YRL

Reading

• Student-nominated readings TBA

March 4  First Drafts of History

• Submit draft of your project by Sunday March 3
• Students will present to peers on the status of their project.

March 11  Final Presentations

Location TBD

March 15  End of winter quarter. All work due.