The L.A. River and the Transformation of Los Angeles UEP 211 section 0 Fall semester 2011

Instructor: Lewis MacAdams

Chap.1 Week 1 Sept 2-4: “The River as it Once Was” pgs 9-39

The text we will use is “The Los Angeles River, Its Life, Death and Possible Re-Birth” by Blake Gumprecht. There are 6 chapters. Class will read 1 chapter a week.

1st Class: September 1st 2011


The arrival of the Spanish

“The 1st Day”: What did The River look like? Imagine yourselves one of the first Europeans. You walked here all the way from Mexico What do you see ? The 1st people: who were they? What were the plants and animals.? How did they use them? Where was the water? What did they see? A habitat rich in diversity, One of the largest concentrations of Indians in the North America. A paradise.

Anyone in the class that hasn’t already chosen a site I want to go to the Chinatown side of the North B’way Bridge, supposedly the first place along the river the pobladores camped. See what it looks like now. Imagine what it looked like then.

Chap. 2 week 2 Sep 6-8: “Sustenance For the Young Pueblo” pgs 41-82

The largest agriculture county in the U.S. in the 1850’s.

The San Fernando Valley looked a little like Kansas – dry land farming

The zanja system. The politics of water Portrait of a zanjero, the most important man in the pueblo, the man who kept the irrigation ditches clean.

On The Hunt: For half a grade, Find the site of the original water wheel that lifted river water to the zanjas (the irrigation ditches; and find the remnants of the zanja madre

Chap. 3 Week 3 Sept. 13th -15th : “ Draining the River Dry” pgs 83-129

1876 the arrival of the railroads, doubling the population, land prices rising, ag lands turning into real estate, pressure on the water system, abandonment on the zanjas. The return of the water system to public control. Enter William Mulholland. Industry spreads along the river banks along with dumps, garbage and dead cows. The Owens Valley
The River Through Downtown, The Piggyback Yard: a possible field trip site visit

The zanjas were tended to by the zanjeros, the highest paid employees in L.A. Building the first reservoirs

Chinatown: the movie

Sept. 20 Paper due at the beginning of class on the differences between the history of the Los Angeles River in the movie and the history itself

Chap. 4 Week 4 Sept. 20-22 A Stream That Could Not Be Trusted pgs131-171

Floods and massive inundations. The river changes course of course. The river doesn’t want to run in straight lines. The River wants to wend.

Call Huntington Library to see the Dockweiler map of the river created in 1890. See who can be scheduled into the vans for the trip. Or another, this time guided by me, trip to the river to understand its ways up close. People living too close to the River, the first calls to channelize it in the 1880’s. The destruction of the railroad infrastructure by water. The arrogance of Alfred Moore.

Chapter 5 week 5 Sept. 27-29 Fifty-One Miles of Concrete. Pgs 173-233

Building the first levees, the advent of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District formed to “contol wild storm waters” The role of the US Army Corps of Engineers.

The paving of the river: Field trip to the Piggyback Yard

Chapter 6 Week 6 Oct. 4-6 Exhuming the River pgs 235-301

The unpaving of the River, the History of FoLAR

Ridding the River of concrete: What would you do? A possible visit by guest-speaker Joe Linton who will talk about the future of the river.

Oct. 11-13 summing up

One major paper subject to consultation with me will be due Oct 13

Extra Credit readings

Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water by Marc Reisner
Introduction and chapters one and two pgs 1-107

Eden by Design By Bill Deverell and Greg Hise: The 1930 Olmsted – Bartholomew plan for the Los Angeles Region

Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, & the Growth of the American West by Donald Worster

Pgs 1-74

Fall Break (no classes) Oct 17-18

1st part of class ends Oct. 18

ECLS 281 Urban Nature Poetry (2 unit course) comes next. Syllabus to be announced. It will not be finky.

Thanksgiving break no classes Nov. 23-25 also Nov. 22 (to be announced)

Dec. 7 Last days of classes