

**English 5640: Advanced Seminar in American Studies****Spring 2010****Learning from Las Vegas**

(meets with English 5610: Honors Seminar in American Studies)

MW 11:50 a.m.-1:10 p.m. LNCO 3880

**Professor Tatum**

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CTI Office Hours: 10:30-11:30 a.m. MW and by appointment

**About this course:** This advanced seminar will focus in interdisciplinary fashion on Las Vegas, Nevada, described by writer Douglas Coupland as “the Detroit of the postindustrial economy.” The class will study the Las Vegas built environment through such texts as Venturi and Brown’s “Learning from Las Vegas,” and Mark Taylor’s long essay on today’s Strip and the Luxor hotel casino as exemplifying postmodernism’s intersection with postindustrial society. The history of Las Vegas will be examined too, especially its role in the atomic West as discussed in “American Ground Zero.” The literature on Las Vegas likely will be represented by such texts as Hunter Thompson’s “Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas,” Dave Hickey’s “Air Guitar,” and Charles Bock’s “Beautiful Children.” Students will be asked to view selected films on Las Vegas (for example, “Leaving Las Vegas”; “One from the Heart”), as well as sample episodes from “CSI: Las Vegas” and the Travel Channel. These and other texts will be situated amid selected readings theorizing the society of the spectacle, postmodernity, and globalization. Course requirements will include short writing assignments plus a seminar length research paper. **NOTE:** Students enrolled in the course should have completed English 2600, 3600, and at least one of the 3700 literary history courses.

**Texts:**

Bock, Beautiful Children

Chung, Las Vegas Then and Now

Fox, In the Desert of Desire

Hickey, Air Guitar

Thompson, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

Venturi, et al, Learning from Las Vegas

Vinegar, Re-learning from Las Vegas

--some e-reserve reading

--independent viewing of Las Vegas themed TV shows, movies, etc.

**Writing Requirements: A)** This Advanced Seminar in English will require a total of at least 20 pages of written work for the semester, including a substantial final research project of at least 12-15 Pages. The final project will be developed in consultation with me, and may take the form of a longer critical paper, or a multimedia presentation. Whatever its final format, the project will require a substantial amount of independent research beyond the course reading assignments. Students will be required, at different dates in the term, to a) submit a prospectus for the final project; b) submit a working

bibliography of research materials; c) turn in a draft of the final project; and b) revise this draft according to instructor feedback. **B)** Students will also be required to write two five page papers associated with their oral participation requirement (see below) and following the format discussed during our first class session and included below.

**Oral Participation Requirement:** A) Each student will report on and lead a discussion of one of the assigned readings during the term (20 minutes). B) Each student will serve as a respondent to another student's oral presentation during the term (20 minutes).  
[The two 5 page papers listed above are tied to these oral presentations]

**Final Grade:**

50% Final Project

25% 2 Five page papers

25% Oral presentations; overall participation

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**Reading and Assignment Schedule:**

January 11: Introduction to the Course

Jan. 13: Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism"  
(On E-reserve)

Jan. 18: No Class: Martin Luther King Holiday

**Postmodern Space and the Built Environment**

Jan. 20: Venturi, Part 1 of Learning from Las Vegas

Vinegar and Golec, "Introduction" to Re-learning from Las Vegas

Jan. 25: Venturi, Part 1 (Continued)

Golec and McMorrough essays from Relearning

Jan. 27: Venturi, Part 2, Learning from Las Vegas

Harries essay from Relearning

Feb. 1: Venturi, Part 2 (Continued)

Vinegar essay in Relearning

Feb. 3: Smith essay in Relearning

Feb. 8/10: Chung, Las Vegas: Then and Now

Mark Taylor essay from Hiding (on E-reserve)

Feb. 15: No class: President Day

**Documentary Film History**

Feb. 17: Viewing: "The Atomic Café"

--PROSPECTUS FOR FINAL PROJECT DUE on or before Friday, Feb 19

February 22/24: No Class: Independent Research Week

**Spaces of Hope?**

March 1: David Harvey, "The Spaces of Utopia" [E-reserve]

Bhatt essay from Relearning

March 3: David Harvey, "Dialectical Utopianism" [E-reserve]

**NonFiction Essayists and the Spectacle:**

March 8: Dave Hickey, from Air Guitar:

"Lost Boys"; "This Mortal Magic"

March 10: Hickey, "A Home in the Neon,"

"Shining Hours/Forgiving Rhyme"

March 15: Hickey, "A Life in the Arts"

"The Delicacy of Rock and Roll"

March 17: Hickey, "A Rhinestone as Big as the Ritz"

"The Little Church of Perry Mason"

--**WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE** on or before Friday, March 19

March 22-26: **SPRING BREAK**

March 29: Student Updates on Final Projects

March 31: Fox, In the Desert of Desire

Preface through chapter 4

April 5: Fox, chapter 5-8

April 7: Fox, chapter 9-through Afterword

**Gonzo Journalism**

April 12/14: Thompson, Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas

--**FIRST DRAFT OF FINAL PROJECT DUE ON OR BEFORE APRIL 16**

**Fiction:**

April 19/21: Bock, Beautiful Children

**Television:**

April 26: CSI: Crime Scene Investigation episode "4X4"

April 28: Lewis and Tatum, from Morta Las Vegas [E-reserve]

--**FINAL PROJECT DUE** on May 3, 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

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**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

**ADA** The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services and activities for people with disabilities; If you will need accommodations in the class, reasonable prior notice needs to be given to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 581-5020 (V/TDD); CDS will work with you and the instructor to make arrangements for accommodations. All written information in this course can be made available in alternative format with prior notification to the Center for Disability Services.

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**I. More Information/Directions: Written Response re Oral Presentation**

Length: 4-5 (max) pages typed, double spaced throughout; justified margins.

Type your name, date, course number in the upper right-hand corner of page.

Next, type the article or book bibliographical information at top of page one in MLA or University of Chicago Style, using a flush left margin. Example:

Lears, T.J. Jackson. No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920. New York: Pantheon, 1981.

Posnock, Ross. "William and Henry James." Raritan 8 (1989): 1-26.

Due: One week after your oral presentation on the reading.

**General Format for Your Response:**

- a. Summarize the article/chapter/book in a paragraph, as if you were writing an abstract
- b. Write a longer discussion of the work, summarizing main points in the argument [question to consider as you put together a./b.: What seems to be the author's perceived "situation" to which the essay or book is the "strategic response"?
- c. Identify what you consider to be THE KEY passage in the work that illustrates Its central perspective and contribution. (you need not fully quote the passage but refer to it in enough detail through summary and phrase quote as you explain WHY you think it the key passage.
- d. Make any relevant connections you find to other readings we've been doing throughout the term
- e. Brief overall reaction/personal interpretation or response to the work.
- f. One or two questions the book provokes in you that might be used in class to start a discussion.

Note: In terms of economy of space, my feeling is that sections b. and c. should get the lion's share of space, perhaps together 1/2 of the overall length of the report.

**II. More Information/Directions: Paper in response to role as respondent to another oral presentation.**

--use biblio format outlined above

- a) summarize the article/chapter reading assignment presented by your peer.
- b) summarize the main points introduced by your peer in his or her presentation.
- c) what did you think was effective about the presentation? Why?
- d) what would you have introduced or emphasized if you had been presenting on this reading? i.e., what other points do you feel could have been covered if there were more time, etc.?)
- e) make any relevant connections to other readings, concepts being discussed this term.
- f) One or two questions you introduced in response to the oral presentation as part of the class discussion.

### III. More Information: the Prospectus for the Final Project

Length: 5 Pages;

Due Date: See reading schedule section of the syllabus

Format: Basically, any prospectus attempts to answer several different questions. Your prospectus should in the end persuade your audience about What you want to do; Why you want to do it; How you will go about doing what you want to do?; and a timeline for stages of the project.

--What Do you want to do?: Write an abstract outlining the subject, topic, or focus of the proposed final project. This abstract should include the research problem or the research question your proposed project will work on. For example, in the conclusion to Bhatt's essay in *Relearning from Las Vegas*, she raises the question about Venturi's *Learning from Las Vegas* book: is its approach an anesthetic [numbing us, i.e., has not critical or oppositional potential) or an aesthetic (i.e., possesses alternative or oppositional power to critique the dominant regime)? One could imagine this as a research question about the Las Vegas built environment that one's project could pursue using x number of sources. In the abstract, which could take up to two pages of your prospectus, you can if you wish state a working thesis or answer to your question based on whatever knowledge you have about the topic prior to doing greater research.

--Why do you want to do it? Or the rationale, justification: usually this part of a prospectus is where you demonstrate an at least passing knowledge of the subject as in a short synopsis of the critical tradition on or about the subject. Usually the point is to say, x, y, or z have said this about this subject, but my research will: complement a point already being argued with new evidence; or provide an alternative view to that dominating in the critical tradition; or critique the dominant critics who have commented on this subject. The point typically is you are "situating" your working hypothesis in and among the conversation that is going on and you begin to sketch out the contribution of your research and/or the "stakes" involved.

--How you will do it? Here you basically outline the sources you will consult in your research, and estimate the timeline for the project's stages. This section, though, will NOT replace a working bibliography that you compile during your research. PT: here you convince the audience that you know where to go in doing the research.

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