

Catherine Jurca
cjurca@hss.caltech.edu
Dabney 311, office hours tbd

Hum 6
Introduction to American Literature and Culture

This course introduces students to the study of American literature and film, by way of three themes that have fundamentally shaped American art, experience, and identity from the founding of the nation to the present. These themes—Nature’s Nation; The Metropolis and Modern Life; and Los Angeles: the Shape of Things to Come—describe not only the settings of the texts we will read and view but their subjects as well. Each setting/subject has profoundly influenced America’s sense of its unique place in art and in history: from a vast and challenging wilderness in the nineteenth century, through the ascendance of industrialization and consumerism in the great urban centers at the turn of the twentieth century, to Los Angeles, center of the culture industry, the postmodern marketer of dreams and nightmares on a global scale. Although literature and film are distinctive aesthetic artifacts, and we will never lose sight of their differences, we will also consider their shared preoccupation with certain types of American characters—the slacker, the entrepreneur, the rugged individualist—as they change over time, as well as the experiments in form generated by such cultural disruptions as industrialization, immigration, standardization, and globalization. Students are expected to develop skills in close textual analysis, whether the language is verbal or visual, and to use these skills to build coherent and persuasive written arguments.

PLEASE NOTE: There are screenings for the course on Mondays, 7:00 pm, on May 2, May 16, and May 23, location tbd. In addition, there is a mandatory three-hour tour of downtown Los Angeles (probably on a weekend day), date tbd.

NATURE’S NATION

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| March 28 | Introduction |
| March 30 | Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself”
“Rip Van Winkle”

ESSAY DUE, in class, 600 words |
| April 5 | Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”
“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” |
| April 7 | Writing workshop |
| April 11 | ESSAY DUE, 1200 words |

April 12 Thoreau, from Walden

April 14 Thoreau

THE METROPOLIS AND MODERN LIFE

April 19 Riis, from How the Other Half Lives, intro, 1-3, 5-6, 9-13, 23-24

April 21 The Birth of Film

April 26 Cahan, “The Imported Bridegroom”

April 28 Chopin, “A Pair of Silk Stockings”

SCREENING: SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

May 3 SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

May 5 SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

May 9 ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

LOS ANGELES, OR THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

May 10 Banham, from Los Angeles: Architecture of the Four Ecologies
West, The Day of the Locust, chaps. 1-7

May 12 West

SCREENING: CHINATOWN

May 17 CHINATOWN

May 19 Class rescheduled for Los Angeles tour

SCREENING: DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

May 24 DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

May 26 DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

May 31 class rescheduled for Los Angeles tour
ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

June 2 class rescheduled for Los Angeles tour

PLEASE NOTE: Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss two classes. If you miss a third you will need to write an additional 1000 word paper. No one will pass this course who misses more than three classes. Showing up for class when you have not done the reading will count as an absence.

To facilitate discussion, you need to use the assigned editions of books, and you must bring them to class.

Laptops, ipads, etc. are not permitted in class (too much emailing and websurfing...I'm on to you!!).

A WORD ABOUT YOUR PAPERS: Unless otherwise noted, papers are due in my mailbox, first floor of Dabney Hall, at 12:00 noon. Quarters pass quickly, and it is easy to fall behind; extensions must be requested in advance, and I urge you not to request them unless an illness or a substantive emergency has intervened. Late papers will not receive written comments, unless the cause is illness or an equivalent emergency. The first paper must be turned in on time; no extensions will be given. You need to receive a passing grade on every assignment to pass the course.

A WORD ABOUT PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is the wrongful use of another person's ideas or words by representing them as one's own. Plagiarism occurs when the general thoughts of another person and/or specific sentences and passages from another writer's work are appropriated without proper attribution in the form of a footnote or endnote. Plagiarism applies to unattributed material that is lifted from unpublished as well as published work and material from the internet. Because this is an introductory course, and I am more interested in your ideas than in the ideas offered in potential sources, you are not to consult outside sources, including books, articles, the internet, published or unpublished papers, etc. to assist you in the writing of your papers. You may discuss the topics with other class members, but I expect every paper to represent independent work.

Grade distribution is as follows:

Papers: 75%

Participation: 15%

In-class quizzes/writing assignments: 10%