

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 art, experience, and identity in the United States from the founding of the nation to the present. These themes—Nature’s Nation; The Metropolis and Modern Life; and Los Angeles, or 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 this country’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 is a mandatory five-hour tour of downtown Los Angeles (probably on a weekend day), date tbd.

NATURE’S NATION

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| Jan 8 | Introduction |
| Jan 10 | Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself”
“Rip Van Winkle”

ESSAY DUE, in class, 600 words |
| Jan 15 | Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”
“The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” |
| Jan 17 | Writing workshop |
| Jan 21 | ESSAY DUE, 1200 words |
| Jan 22 | Thoreau, from WALDEN |

Jan 24 Thoreau

THE METROPOLIS AND MODERN LIFE

Jan 29 Riis, from HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES, intro, chaps. 1-3, 5-6, 9-13,
23-24

Jan 31 Cahan, "The Imported Bridegroom"

Feb 5 Chopin, "A Pair of Silk Stockings"

Feb 7 SUNRISE

Feb 12 MODERN TIMES

Feb 14 class rescheduled for LA tour

Feb 15 ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

LOS ANGELES, OR THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Feb 19 Banham, from LOS ANGELES: THE ARCHITECTURE OF FOUR
ECOLOGIES, chaps. 1, 4, 6, 10-11
West, THE DAY OF THE LOCUST, chaps. 1-7

Feb 21 West, chap. 7-end

Feb 26 CHINATOWN

Feb 28 DIE HARD

March 5 COLLATERAL

March 7 class rescheduled for LA tour

March 12 class rescheduled for LA tour

March 13 ESSAY DUE, 1500 words

PLEASE NOTE: Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss 3 classes. No one will pass this course who misses more than three classes. Showing up for class when you have not done the reading or watched the film 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 will only be granted in the case of illness or a substantive emergency. The first paper must be turned in on time; no extensions will be given for any reason. 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: 85%

Participation: 15%