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 Thursdays, 7:30 pm, on Feb 3, Feb 17, Feb 24, location tbd. In addition, there is a mandatory three-hour tour of downtown Los Angeles (on a weekend day), date tba.

NATURE’S NATION

Jan 4 Introduction

Jan 6 Irving, “The Author’s Account of Himself”
   “Rip Van Winkle”

ESSAY DUE, in class, 600 words

Jan 11 Irving, “Rip Van Winkle”
   “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow”

Jan 13 Writing workshop

Jan 17 ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

Jan 18 Thoreau, from Walden
Jan 20    Thoreau

THE METROPOLIS AND MODERN LIFE

Jan 25    Riis, from *How the Other Half Lives*, intro, 1-3, 5-6, 9-13, 23-24

Jan 27    The Birth of Film

Feb 1     Cahan, “The Imported Bridegroom”

Feb 3     Chopin, “A Pair of Silk Stockings”

SCREENING:  SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

Feb 8     SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

Feb 10    SUNRISE and MODERN TIMES

Feb 14    ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

LOS ANGELES, OR THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

Feb 15    Banham, from *Los Angeles: Architecture of the Four Ecologies*

West, *The Day of the Locust*

Feb 17    West

SCREENING: THE BIG SLEEP

Feb 22    THE BIG SLEEP

Feb 24    Class rescheduled for Los Angeles tour

SCREENING: DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

March 1   DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

March 3   DIE HARD and COLLATERAL

March 8   class rescheduled for Los Angeles tour

ESSAY DUE, 1200 words

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.

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 writing assignments: 10%