

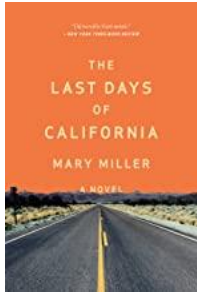
Road Trip

ENGL 387—Topics in Women's Literature

Spring 2024

Professor Gwen Bergner

MWF 9:30-10:20



Road trip, destination unknown. Where will this course go? What will we see? Who will we become? Will we get where we're going?

"The all-American road trip has long been a signature adventure," declares a writer explaining "[What it means to be American.](#)" And the road novel, road memoir, or road movie has evolved as a genre, along with the car and the interstate highway system, to celebrate Americans' romance with the open road. But who is in the driver's seat?

Long a man's genre and a man's pursuit, traveling for adventure and self-discovery requires leisure, autonomy, and a lack of responsibilities at home. Women traveled, of course, but they were fewer and farther between. Women were expected to stay home and out of trouble, minding the house and kids. As Huck famously says at the end of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally is trying to sivilize me, and I can't stand it." The frontier, the new, the wild was not for women.

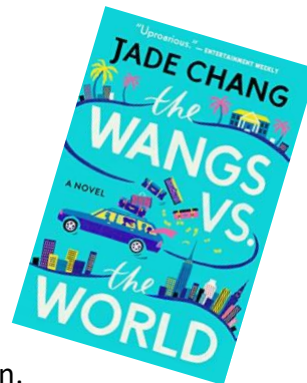


At the same time, not everyone takes to the road for adventure. Many people travel in search of economic opportunity, political refuge, or lost family. Others are barred from travel by limited resources, racial and ethnic segregation, and the placement of political borders. The freedom of the open road truly depends on political and economic freedoms.

If taking to the open road is a quintessentially American adventure, this course explores how women represent it in relation to varying circumstances of race, class, and sexuality. Through novels, a memoir, a graphic novel, and a Hollywood buddy picture, we will consider how they lose themselves and find themselves in the American landscape, both geographic and political.

Primary texts include:

- Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees* (1988)
- Thelma and Louise*, dir. Ridley Scott (1991)
- Erika Lopez, *Flaming Iguanas* (1998)
- Mary Miller, *The Last Days of California* (2014)
- Jade Chang, *The Wangs Vs. the World* (2016)
- Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)



--This course promises a journey, not a destination.