



**American West
History 616
Fall 2001
Robinson A248
M 7:20-10:00**

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- Monday,
August 27 — Housekeeping & Introductions
- Monday,
September 6 — **NO CLASS-LABOR DAY**
- Monday,
September 10 — Reading:
Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History"
William Cronon, et al., "Becoming West: Toward a New Meaning for Western History," *Under an Open Sky*
Richard White, "Are You an Environmentalist? Or Do You Work for a Living," *Uncommon Ground*
Katherine Morrissey, "Engendering the West," *Under an Open Sky*
William Deverell, "Fighting Words: The Significance of the American West in the History of the United States," *Western Historical Quarterly* XXV (Summer 1994)
David Emmons, "Constructed Province: History and the Making of the Last American West," and "A Round table of Responses," *Western Historical Quarterly* XXV (Winter 1994)
- Monday,
September 17 — Reading:
Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*
Larry McMurtry, "Wagons Ho Hum!" *New Republic*, Oct. 22, 1990
(Bring in one outside review or commentary on *Legacy of Conquest*)
- Monday,
September 24 — Reading:
Ramon Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away*
PAPER TOPIC DUE

- Monday,
October 1 — Reading:
Richard White, *Middle Ground*
- Wednesday,
October 10 — Reading:
John Logan Allen, *Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest*
Bernard DeVoto, *Journals of Lewis and Clark*, excerpts
- Monday,
October 15 — Reading:
Elliot West, *The Way to the West*
Susan Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers: The Significance of Gender in the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* XXIV (November 1993)
PAPER SYNOPSIS DUE
- Monday,
October 22 — Reading:
William Robbins, *Colony and Empire*
- Monday,
October 29 — Reading:
Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of Mormonism*
ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE
- Monday,
November 5 — Reading:
James Welch, *Fool's Crow*
Ian Frazier, *On the Rez*
David R. Lewis, "Still Native: The Significance of Native Americans in the History of the 20th Century American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* (May 1993)
- Monday,
November 12 — Reading:
Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*
- Monday,
November 19 — Reading:
George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*
Antonia Casteneda, "Women of Color and the Rewriting of Western History," *Pacific Historical Review*, 1992
David G. Gutierrez, "Significant to Whom?: Mexican Americans and the History of the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* (November 1993)
FIRST DRAFT DUE
- Monday,
November 26 — Reading:
Mark Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*

John Findlay, "Far Western Cityscapes and American Culture Since 1940," *Western Historical Quarterly* XXII (February 1991)

Monday,
December 3

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Reading:

Kevin Fernlund, ed., *Cold War West*, excerpts

Michael McGerr, "Is There a Twentieth Century West?" in *Under an Open Sky*

Richard White, "The Current Weirdness in the West," *Western Historical Quarterly*, XXVIII (Spring 1997)

McLure, Helen, "The Wild, Wild Web: The Mythic American West and the Electronic Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* XXXI (Winter 2000)

Tuesday,
December 11

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FINAL PAPER DUE
SELF-EVALUATION DUE



COURSE

Americans have always been fascinated with the idea of place, especially the West, and with its collateral idea, the frontier. This course is designed as an exploration of these ideas and as an introduction to the major themes and arguments in the history of the trans-Mississippi West, the region most closely identified with “frontier.” As class participants might expect, the class is an intensive reading in which the emphasis is on interpretation rather than the recall of facts. (A scholar once remarked, “A readings course is the process of stuffing oneself on books until one is done up like a Thanksgiving turkey.”) The turkey business aside, this is an “old timey” graduate seminar, in which the emphasis is on discussion and the exchange of ideas. If you are entirely new to the history of the American West, you may wish to pick an overview. The Oxford History of the American West, Clyde Milner II, ed. and *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, Richard White are good bets.

BOOKS

The following books are required for the course. They are available in the Campus Bookstore.

Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*
Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History*
Bernard DeVoto, ed., *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*
Ramon A. Gutierrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away*
William Cronon, ed., *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America’s Western Past*
William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*
Elliott West, *The Way to the West: Essays on the Central Plains*
William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire*
Richard White, *The Middle Ground*
Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*
Ian Frazier, *On the Rez*
James Welch, *Fools Crow*
George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*
Neil Foley, *White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*
Gary Y. Okihiro, *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*
Kevin Fernlund, ed., *The Cold War American West, 1945-1989*
Mark Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water*
John Logan Allen, *Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest*

POLICIES

Attendance

Participants in a graduate seminar are expected to attend class unless some dire emergency arises—something on the order of a cosmic intervention. Because the class makes relatively few “writing” demands and depends largely on class discussion, it is even more important that students come to class prepared to enter into lively debate. In fact, failure to attend class on many occasions will have grave consequences. A word to the wise, in short, should be sufficient.

A Note on Computer Use

Computers are a great boon to the graduate student. But, as with any technology, you must take steps to minimize the problems that computers inevitably cause. Do not expect to get through the semester without having at least one computer crisis. Prepare for this well in advance. Back up your work constantly and have alternative plans for obtaining computer use, if your primary options fail you. I will never accept computer problems as excuses for missed assignments. You must also keep backup copies of submitted assignments—either in electronic form or hard copy.

Similarly, computers and email permit around-the-clock communication. If you have questions or need to apprise me of an emergency situation, contact me via email.

ppetrik@gmu.edu

Should you need to discuss an issue with the instructor, contact me via email or by phone to make an appointment. Do not, however, expect an immediate response. Many of your questions can be answered by consulting the web site at:

<http://www.archiva.net>

Your best chance of reaching me immediately by email is during my office hours. Even then I cannot make a guarantee because I may well be with another student.

Grades

Grades, including +s and -s, will be assigned in the following manner. REMEMBER THEY REPRESENT AN EVALUATION, NOT A REWARD. To rephrase Smith-Barney (now Salomon Smith Barney), the investment folk, we do grades the old-fashioned way—earn them.

A—Outstanding work, complete mastery of the material presented, combined with some originality.

B—A solid command of the material with some gaps or mistakes in a basically sound essay or discussion.

C—Some knowledge of the material; mistakes and confusion are acceptable if mixed with some understanding. Not a reward for attendance or effort.

D—An incomplete and minimal knowledge of the material, major confusions and errors.

F—A failure to present the material in a reasonably accurate and comprehensible manner.

I—There are no “incompletes” given in this course except in cases of bona fide and documented instances in accordance with the regulations of the university.

P—For a “pass” a “C” average is required.

If you receive a grade or criticism that seems unfair or if you desire further explanation, please feel free to discuss the matter with me.

REQUIREMENTS

The requirements for the course are as follows: (1) Reading Summary and Seminar Participation (25%); (2) one seminar discussion leadership (15%); (3) Rough Draft and Preliminary Components (20%); and (4) Final Paper (40%); (5) a self-evaluation (one-page, typed, single-spaced) assessing your performance in the course (not graded but required).

Reading Summary & Seminar Participation

Each week you are expected to turn in a 2-3 page summary of the reading for that week. These must be in my mailbox in the department office (or emailed to me in RTF format) before class. Like a book review, these summaries should recapitulate the readings thesis, articulate the kind of evidence that the author draws on, and make some critical comment. These will, in all candor, drive you nuts, but they will hone your writing skills and prove invaluable when the time comes for your comprehensives. Seminar participation means lively and engaged discussion of the readings. You cannot hope to derive the most from the course if you sit on the sidelines and listen to the play-by-play.

Seminar Discussion Leadership

Each class member (or team of two) will be responsible for leading at least one class discussion. The leader (or leaders) is responsible for initiating and maintaining the discussion. I will be on hand to facilitate the process, but the leader (or leaders) will be responsible for setting the agenda for the class.

Paper Draft & Preliminary Components

It's extremely important to get an early start on your paper and make continuous progress toward its completion by completing elements of the paper throughout the semester. This requirement is intended to keep you on track. If you complete the assignments on time and good order, you receive full credit.

Final Paper

Your paper will be an analytical essay (15–20 pages) discussing the literature on a particular topic in the history of the American West. Your paper should reflect the most recent scholarship and include a critical discussion of the central arguments. Be careful in selecting your topic to choose one that is feasible within the time constraints of the semester. I am flexible on choice of topic.

SELF-EVALUATION GUIDELINES

Oftentimes, a letter grade does not reflect the effort that students put into a course, the amount a student has learned, or the skills that a student has acquired. A self-evaluation is one way of remedying this deficiency by illustrating and documenting your participation in the course from your perspective. This is the time to argue for yourself and put your best foot forward. In fact, it is in your interest to do the best job that you can on this assignment. The self-evaluation should be a one-page, typed single-spaced paper in which you address the following topics:

- I. Evaluation of your participation in the class
 - A. attendance
 - B. time devoted to the materials
 1. assigned reading
 2. reading summaries
 3. seminar leadership
 4. paper draft & preliminary components
 5. final paper
 - C. class participation
 1. seminar discussion
 - D. the ways in which you think you improved or not
 - E. the problems you encountered in your effort to complete the class assignments to your satisfaction.
 - F. what you would have done differently
 - G. some of the skills or knowledge that you acquired
- II. A general assessment of how you will apply what you have gained (or not) from the class in the future