Course Description

This course will introduce you to key works in US Western history. While its regional focus seems an obvious starting point to define its analytical scope, western history is an often contentious, and somewhat fractured field of study. No consensus exists about what the West is (or was) and how historians should tell its story. Many scholars, including the insurgent "new western" historians, offered totalizing narratives, either to make sense of a nationalist understanding of the past, or to rescue the histories of those peoples (and the natural world) who fell victim to the western expansion of the US government.

The readings are roughly organized chronologically and thematically. I’ve selected works that exemplify the kinds of questions scholars are asking in the field today. After sampling these readings and discussing them with your classmates, you will begin to see how and why the field is often so hard to define.

Nonetheless, by completing this course you will develop a deeper appreciation for the history US West, and its larger place in American history. Specifically you should be able to:

- locate western scholarship in its historiographical context
- identify and evaluate the central thesis in a piece of historical scholarship
- critically evaluate the author’s argument and use of historical sources
- conduct a productive and lively intellectual discussion
- understand the crosscurrents and tensions in western historical scholarship
- write a historiographical - review essay
- create a dynamic and positive intellectual community

The success of the seminar format rests largely in your hands. To create the best, most intellectually stimulating environment, everyone needs to come to class prepared and ready to discuss the assigned readings and/or share your thoughts and criticism. Your classmates will be counting on you to contribute your ideas, questions, and insights. We will be learning from each other. While I may interject from time to time, I did not design the class with a lecture format in mind.

Required Reading

You will find the following books available at the bookstore. (You might be able to find cheaper used and electronic copies elsewhere). Most of these books are available on in the library as ebooks. Additional readings will be posted on Canvas.


**Assignments and Grading:**

**Leading Discussion:** (20%) Each of you will be responsible for facilitating class discussion at least once (or twice, given the enrollment) during the course of the semester. That responsibility will involve:

- Posting 1 discussion-stimulating question on the class blog and starting the conversation with some of your general impressions of that week’s reading. This must be done by Friday night prior to class.
- As a part of your class presentation, you will need to place the book/chapters/articles in their historiographical context. This will require you to do a bit of research, reading through the author’s footnotes, and making sure you understand how the author hopes to advance the field with this particular piece of scholarship. Look at book reviews. Figure out how the book has been received. How does the book or essay influence the debates on its particular topic? Does the work fill a particular gap in the field? Make sure you can articulate the book or essay’s argument and larger historical significance.
- Guiding your classmates through the reading, making sure we draw out the authors’ major points
- Assessing the book’s contribution to the literature, as well as its limitations
- Connecting the author’s ideas to others works
- Encouraging class participation

**Class participation:** (20%) measured by attendance and your weekly responses to the discussion leaders’ blog postings. You must post a thoughtful response to the question posed by your classmate. Alternatively, you may raise a question that his/her posting inspires or respond to another classmate’s commentary.

**Critical book review:** (25%) 6-8 page review, due the week you lead class discussion.

**Review Essay:** (35%) 15-20 page paper where you examine one of the topics we discuss in class in greater depth. Begin by choosing one of the books we are reading for class (avoid the book you are using for your critical book review) and then explore other books and articles that explore similar questions. Your initial bibliography is due in class on 10/26. This is not a research paper.
Class Readings Schedule

8/31: Introductions and sign up for class discussion leaders.
Film: Stagecoach, (Excerpts)

9/7: No Class Labor Day!

Issues in Methodology and Theory

9/14: Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier In American History Chapters 1, 7 and 12. (Canvas)

Stephen Aron, “The Making of the First American West and the Unmaking of Other Realms;” and Elliot West, "Thinking West." (Canvas)

The Spanish/Mexican North


9/28: Steven W. Hackel, "The Staff of Leadership: Indian Authority in the Missions of Alta California," The William and Mary Quarterly, (April 1997), 347-376. (Canvas)

Pekka Hämäläinen, “The Rise and Fall of Plains Indian Horse Cultures,” Journal of American History (12/2003), 833-862. (Canvas)

Political Economy of Nineteenth Century US Western Expansion


10/12: David Igler, "The Industrial Far West: Region and Nation in the Late Nineteenth Century," Pacific Historical Review, 69 (May 2000), 159-192. (Canvas)

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "Colonialism in Equality: Hawaiian Sovereignty and the Question of U.S. Civil Rights." (Canvas)

Walter L. Hixon, Settler Colonialism: A History (chapter 1, introduction and chapter 6: “They Promised to Take our Land, and they Took It’: Settler Colonialism in the American West.” Canvas (library permalink, just scroll down to the appropriate chapters)

Western Environmental Change


Bibliographies for Review Essay Due.

Women and Gender in the US West


John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*.

11/9: Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America’s Frontier Past*


Borderlands


Western Popular Culture


12/7: Film: *Lone Star*

Review Essays due in class