

January 30, 2017
R.G. Walters
Spring Semester 2017

PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS A PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS FOR REASONS WE WILL EXPLAIN IN THE FIRST MEETING. THE TOPICS WILL REMAIN THE SAME BUT SOME READINGS WILL BE CHANGED.

THE AMERICAN WEST:
100.335

About the Course:

Course readings largely consist of first-person accounts and fictional views of the west. Lectures will raise questions for students to consider, provide alternative perspectives, and give historical background in order to help students analyze and discuss the readings in section. The time period covered in the course is roughly 1800 to the first decade of the twentieth century, with a look ahead the final week.

Among the larger questions this course will consider are:

- What is the role of “the west,” and its settlement by Europeans, in American history? In world history?
- What is a frontier? How does it differ from “the west”? (If you are interested in seeing how peculiar the English regard the American definition of “frontier,” look up the word in *The Oxford English Dictionary Based on Historical Principles*.)
- How different was the frontier from the “civilized” areas of the country?
- In what ways has the west shaped American culture?
- What were the roles of politics and institutions in shaping the west?
- What were the varieties of frontiers and frontier experiences?
- How did race, culture, gender, and the nature of work shape the west?
- What is the place of the west in American popular culture?

Week Topics and Assignments

Part I: Into the West

1/30 Introduction to the Course

Topics: About the course. How to think about the West.

Reading: Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” This essay is widely available, including on line as the first chapter in: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TURNER/>

2/6 Exploration

Topics: The west as part of an age of exploration. The clash of empires in the west.

Reading: Bernard DeVoto, ed., *The Journals of Lewis and Clark*, pp. xxiii-lx, 33-90, 202-15, 249-91, 453-78, 481-87.

Trivia question: True or false: there was a rock band called the Lewis & Clarke Expedition, one member of which went on to become a major country music singer.

2/13 Indians and Empire

Topics: Native Americans in the struggle for empire. Were there better paths not taken?

Reading: Don Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography*.

Viewing: Gallery images of Indians on our web site.

Trivia question: Where can you find an important pre-Civil War painting of Indians in Baltimore?

2/20 Kings of the Wild Frontier

Topics: Frontier types: Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and mountain men. The frontiersman as popular hero.

Reading: Davy Crockett, *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*.

Viewing: Clips from *Davy Crockett*, *Jeremiah Johnson*.

Recommended Internet: Can you locate one or more dime novels—cheap nineteenth-century fiction produced mostly for boys and young men—with Davy Crockett as its hero?

Trivia question: What is the present career of an actor who played both Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone?

2/27 The Overland Trail

Topics: Traveling across the continent. How the experience did and did not change gender relations. The story of Narcissa Whitman.

Reading: Kenneth Holmes, ed., *Covered Wagon Women*.

Recommended Internet: Browse diaries (see our web site). Can you find ones from women that talk about the overland trail? You might compare one by a woman with one by a man.

Trivia question: On December 31, 1836 a letter from Narcissa Whitman about her missionary work appeared in a religious journal. You can read it in the Eisenhower Library. How can you find it? (If you can answer this one you can answer the trivia question for the week of 11/17.)

Part II: Western Experiences

3/6 The Mining Frontier

Topics: How gold and silver settled the west. The Aspen story.

Reading: Patricia Nelson Limerick, “The Gold Rush and the Shaping of the American West,” in *Something in the Soil* [available on electronic reserves].

Recommended Viewing and Listening: American Memory web site materials on early California.

Trivia question (highbrow division): Name an opera by a famous composer that is set in Gold Rush California?

Trivia question (lowbrow division): Is the song “After the Gold Rush” about the Gold Rush? (Answers to both in our music gallery.)

Trivia question (really arcane knowledge division): What California-born African American intellectual wrote about an important California-born Harvard philosopher whose mother left a well-known account of her life in a Gold Rush mining camp.

3/13 How Wild Was the West?

Topics: Frontier violence—what it was and where. Real cowboys. Dodge City Confidential.

Reading: Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, Chapters 1, 10-17, 19, 21, 25-6, 29-31, 35-6, 40-51, 57, 60-1, and 79.

Recommended Viewing: *Red River vs. Abilene Town*. A good movie and a bad movie about cattle drives and cowboys.

Recommended Internet: Pick one or more western towns with reputations for being violent—Bodie, Dodge City, Tombstone, and Placerville (aka Hangtown) all come to mind. Find out what they looked like in the nineteenth century and compare that with how their boosters represent them today. Do they play upon that supposedly violent past?

Trivia question: Were there really places with names like Murderer’s Bar and Whiskey Town, or are these the part of the mythology of the wild west?

Trivia question: What bubbly, perky, annoying blonde actress once played Calamity Jane, the notorious western bad woman, in a movie?

3/20 SPRING BREAK

3/27 Not Quite the End of the Trail

Topics: Native American resistance revisited. The “vanishing Americans” don’t go away.

Reading: Black Elk, *Black Elk Speaks*, with a preface by John G. Neihardt

Recommended internet: Is John G. Neihardt trustworthy? Also use our interactive map to compare the west at the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition with the west in 1900.

Trivia question: What Indian icon was from the Sicilian tribe? (Answered in lecture.)

4/3 Making It and Faking It

Topics: Land of opportunity. Homesteading, or, why would anyone want to live in southwestern Wyoming, anyway? The Woman Homesteader unmasked.

Reading: Selections from Elinor Pruitt, Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, Chapters 1 through XXVI, XXII to end.

Viewing: Clips from *Heartland* and *Little House on the Prairie*

Trivia question: One reviewer of Elinor Stewart's book spoke of "the canny Scotsman's quick surrender to her charms. . . ." In what famous literary journal did that review appear?

Part III: Imagining the West

4/10 The Wild West: A Buffalo Bill Production

Topics: Western myths emerge. Buffalo Bill moves from the plains to the page and stage. Early western movies and the real west, Hollywood style.

Reading: Col. Prentiss Ingraham, *The Adventures of Buffalo Bill from Boyhood to Manhood*. Available at: <http://www-sul.stanford.edu/depts/dp/pennies/home.html>

Viewing: Clips from *Hell's Hinges*.

Internet: Can you find early western movies or western heroes on the Internet?

Trivia question: What was Buffalo Bill's first appearance in a movie and can you view it on the Internet? (Careful, this is a trick question.)

4/17 A Genre Is Born

Topics: How did Teddy Roosevelt become our first cowboy president? Why did an upper-class snob write a classic cowboy novel? Why is a Redwood grove in Northern California named after one of his friends? And how did Ruby Rebecca Blevins, a motorcycle-loving young woman from Arkansas, become Patsy Montana?

Reading: Begin Owen Wister, *The Virginian*.

4/24 More about the Western

Topics: The rise, fall, rise again, and fall again of the Western.

Reading: Finish and be prepared to discuss Owen Wister, *The Virginian*.

Recommended viewing: Three film versions of *The Virginian*

Recommended internet: Find music by singing cowboys and cowgirls.

Play it loudly around people you do not like. Who are cowboy poets and should they be stopped?

Trivia question: What present-day political leader had a role in a western movie playing a character named Handsome Stranger? (Answer is on our Movie Gallery.)

Part IV: The End of the Trail

5/1 The West as Dystopia

Reading: TBA

Topics: Visions of western apocalypses, or, Los Angeles ravaged by drought, cars, earthquakes, space aliens, and killer squirrels.

Reading: Recommended Viewing: Clips from *Blade Runner*, *Independence Day*

Trivia question: What 1997 movie uses a plot device from *Day of the Locust* and who won an Academy Award because of it?

Assignments:

Reaction papers: Each week in section hand in a brief, informal reaction paper. These should indicate your response to the week's materials and questions you may have about them. These papers will be part of your grade for participation, discussed below.

Assignment #1, due in section the week of 2/17, approximately 15% of the final grade, 5-7 double-spaced pages: *A word often used in accounts of the Lewis and Clark expedition is "epic." In what sense was it, and was it not, an epic? And whose epic was it?* [Hint: for the essay to work well, you are going to need to set up a definition of the word somewhere near the beginning of it. If you want help with that you can either consult a guide to literary terms or go to any respectable dictionary. For historians the best usually is *The Oxford English Dictionary*, available in the Eisenhower Library and on-line.]

Assignment #2, due in section the week of 10/31, approximately 25% of the grade, 5-8 double-spaced pages: *One cliché about the west is that, like America in general, it is a "land of opportunity." Up to this point in the course, what kind of opportunities and for whom?*

Final Paper, due in your Teaching Assistant's History Department mailbox (311 Gilman) by 4:30 on December 13. Approximately 40% of your course grade, 12-15 double-spaced pages:

Looking at readings and lectures from the beginning of the course to the end, what do you see as the most significant differences between *representations* of the west in works of fiction and works like Crockett's autobiography and *Letters of a Woman Homesteader* and what westerners themselves and historians say about the west? How do you explain those differences?

Those of you who are less mathematically-challenged than the professor may have noted that the percentages above do not add up to 100%. That is because participation will also figure into the final grade, as explained in the next section.

Grading criteria:

Class participation will count a half grade. Good participation (a plus) means missing no more than two sections and contributing actively and constructively to discussions. Neutral participation (neither plus nor minus) means less-than-perfect attendance and/or uneven contributions to discussions. Poor attendance and little or no contributions to discussions will cost a half grade.

Written work: We look for the following in essays: 1) is the argument expressed clearly; 2) does the author have a major theme or themes?; 3) does the author tell the reader what is significant about the argument?; 4) does the author use of all available and appropriate evidence?; 5) is the author judicious—does he or she, for example, consider possible objections and counter-arguments?; 6) does the argument develop in logical fashion; and, 7) is the conclusion of the paper consistent with the introduction and is it persuasive? **Please also note that papers must be based on material from course assignments and lectures, not on material from other sources..**

Help:

In addition to urging you to use campus-wide resources for help with academic problems, we are happy to offer special assistance with students who may be struggling with course materials. Please make use of office hours or arrange for appointments. If you are having difficulty keeping up with the readings, please contact either the professor or your teaching assistant. We are also happy to help with writing problems, as are the staff of the Writing Center:

http://www.jhu.edu/~english/writing_center/

Course Staff:

Professor Walters:

Office: 302 Gilman Hall

Office hours: Tuesday 2-4 and by appointment

Email: rgw1@jhu.edu

Office phone: (410) 516-7588

Samuel Backer

sbacker2@jhu.edu

For information about academic ethics please see the guide on “Academic Ethics for Undergraduates” and consult the Ethics Board’s web site: <http://ethics.jhu.edu>

