

HIST 5377
The American West – Graduate Readings
College of Humanities and Sciences

Contact:

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Office Hours: TuTH 11:00AM to 12:15PM, and by appointment

Class Time: ONLINE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Study of the American West, and of Americans' Westward Movement, has been among the oldest pursuits of professional history in the United States. Early progressive historians, like Frederick Jackson Turner, defined the United States by its frontier experience, claiming that the American Nation's leap across North America's wilderness shaped its society and institutions. In recent decades, study of the American West has diversified into one of the most eclectic and genre-bending fields of American History. Historians of the West have debated about whether the West is a definable region or a series of American frontiers – place or process, and in the course of that debate have come to identify the ways in which America's western landscape and many different people have shaped one another. Through five groupings of readings, this course will introduce graduate students to the modern "state of the field" in Western History. We will investigate the emergence of the New Western History through the debate over significance of America's frontier. We will then investigate contact and conflict between Americans and the West's indigenous inhabitants. A third grouping will investigate gender, social relations, and social institutions as they moved and emerged on the Overland Trails. A fourth grouping will investigate the profound impact of industrialization, capitalization, and settlement on the American West. Finally a fifth grouping will look at popular memory of the American West, and how the region's physical features, history, and mythology lay firmly rooted in a greater American mythology.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course is designed to develop students in the following skill areas

- To **interpret** and **apply** historical data and sources
- To **analyze** and **critique** arguments and interpretations of the past
- To **formulate** a clear understanding of the historical, geographic, and cultural factors that build American regional identities
- To **evaluate** the impact of the past upon the present, and **assess** the forces that shape the West, its identity, its landscape, its politics, and its culture.

CLASS DIRECTIVES

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted,

plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. A copy of the University policy is available on the Sam Houston State University website. If you need clarification about what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to ask or see me during office hours.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Considering the online format, this course is designed to be an interactive directed readings seminar rather than a wholly traditional lecture course. The class will be broken into four units – one centered on each book. Along with the reading, there will be weekly tasks that need to be completed, all designed to help you contextualize and understand the readings, while encouraging students to engage with one another and the instructor on the material. In addition to weekly tasks, each unit will culminate with a book review assignment, which will always be due before midnight, on the final Friday of each unit. Grades for the course will be figured according to the following criterion: participation (completion of mini-lectures and note sessions), discussion boards, and book reviews.

Weekly Tasks:

Each week of the course will have supplementary material that will need to be completed by the end of that week, in addition to staying on top of the reading. Each book in the course will require submission of a precis and participation in an intensive discussion.

These will include: recorded lectures (generally 10-15 minutes in length), downloadable PowerPoint presentations (these will complement and expand upon recorded lectures), other multimedia as deemed appropriate.

Discussion boards:

In weeks (as identified in the course schedule) where there is a discussion question every student will need to contribute. At a bare minimum, each student is required to produce their own response to the question(s) for the week and respond to at least two (2) other student responses. This is obviously purely the minimum, and students are encouraged to engage in the discussion boards as much as possible.

Discussion board format: Student answers to the main, instructor provided question are expected to be about 150-200 words in length. Replies to student contributions should be at least about 50 words in length. These are minimum thresholds, and – of course – responses may exceed that limit within reason. During discussion board weeks, initial posts will always be due by Saturday, by 10 pm, unless indicated otherwise. Responses will always be due by Sunday, by 10 pm, unless indicated otherwise.

Discussion board decorum: This is a format for cooperative learning and debate. Disagreement over the material and how it is interpreted is not only welcome, but it is encouraged. That being said, this is an online class, not a Youtube comment section, debate must follow a set of rules. They are pretty simple. (1) Disagreement must be civil, and concerned only with course material. Injurious comments of a personal nature, insults, threats, etc. will **ABSOLUTELY NOT BE TOLERATED**. (2) Respect is the name of the game. Expect to receive it and make sure you give it.

Book Precis:

This is the “meat and potatoes,” if you will, of the course. Each Precis will need to follow a format (provided below) and meet certain criteria (also provided below). All reviews will be graded according to how closely they meet format and criterion.

Precis format:

- All reviews need to be typed with one of the following word processor programs: MSWord, Word Perfect, WordPad, Google Docs (DO NOT USE NOTEPAD)
- All reviews must be submitted according to one of the following formats: MSWord File (.doc or .docx), Rich Text Format (.rtf), or PDF. If you use Google Docs, make sure to save your file as one of the aforementioned formats.
- All reviews must be typed in a 12 point font (Times New Roman, Cambria, Calibri, and Arial are all acceptable). Make sure all margins are 1 inch, and text should be double spaced. Indent paragraphs and do not insert an extra space between paragraphs.
- The top line of your precis should include the standard Chicago Manual Style Bibliographic Citation of the book. For a guide on bibliographic citations, refer to the Chicago Manual of Style: http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-1.html
- Precis will initially have an assigned word limit. As the semester goes on they will have an exact amount of required words. The purpose for this limitation is to beef up your writing skills and give you lots of practice with a professional genre of historical writing – academic

book reviews. Initial precis will be allowed to be between 450-500 words, as the semester goes on they will need to be EXACTLY 250 words.

Precis criterion:

- Precis should be thoroughly proofread and edited, and all typos, spelling errors, grammatical errors, and punctuation errors should be expunged.
- All precis after the first should respond to the stylistic notes provided in comments by the instructor. As the course moves on you should work to eradicate issues such as passive voice, tense agreement, verb agreement, pronoun agreement, word choices, and other stylistic issues out of your writing.
- Each precis cover the following areas (in your reviews you may use subheadings, if necessary, to indicate where you address each areas: (1) Identify the argument of the book. (2) Contextualize the argument in historiography. (3) Evaluate the argument and evidence.
- Citations: for information drawn from each biography you will need to provide a page number citation at the end of the sentence in parentheses. You may use outside sources to help you contextualize books, or if it is pertinent to the direction of your review. Full citations, however, of any outside source must be provided in either Turabian/Chicago Manual, MLA, or APA formats.

Midterm Journal:

This assignment will ask you reflect upon and evaluate the first half of the course. In this journal you will need to assess the value of the material presented, measure your progress in skills such as critical reading and analytical writing, and appraise each element of the course. What course components do you find the most helpful? What could be changed or tailored to improve your learning experience? Completion of your midterm journal will be figured as part of your participation grade.

DIGITAL OFFICE HOURS

Of course, I can always be reached by email; however, for those of you who would like to be able to have a more in depth discussion, and either live remotely or are unable to be on campus, I am more than happy to “hold office hours” by Skype. Contact me via email to arrange and schedule a skype session, and I will provide you with my skype address.

GRADES

All assignments and exams will be assessed according to the standard grading scale used by the College of Humanities and Sciences and Graduate Program.

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	<60

Final Grades in the course will be figured according to the following weights:

Precis will be graded in ascending weight as the semester goes on. This is designed to reward your improvement over the course of the semester.

Precis 1-5 25%
Precis 6-11 35%
Discussions 30%
Participation 10%

REQUIRED BOOKS

Limerick, Patricia Nelson. *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987.

Calloway, Colin G. *One Vast Winter Count: The Native American West before Lewis and Clark*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

Hamalainen, Pekka. *The Comanche Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

Blackhawk, Ned. *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

Faragher, John Mack. *Women and Men on the Overland Trail*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979.

Pascoe, Peggy. *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Cronon, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.

Worster, Donald. *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

White, Richard. *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.

Warren, Louis S. *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show*. New York: Vintage Press, 2006.

Smith, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Please note that the course schedule is subject to change, if necessary. Any amendments to the schedule of courses will be announced and distributed with ample notice.

Module 1: Course Organization (1/17-1/21)

Discussion 1, initial posts due 1/20, replies due 1/21

Module 2: Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* (1/22-1/28)

Precis 1 due 1/26

Discussion 2, initial posts due 1/27, replies due 1/28

Module 3: Colin Calloway, *One Vast Winter Count* (1/29-2/4)

Precis 2 due 2/2

Discussion 3, initial posts due 2/3, replies due 2/4

Module 4: Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (2/5-2/18)

Precis 3 due 2/16

Discussion 4, initial posts due 2/17, replies due 2/18

Module 5: Ned Blackhawk, *Violence over the Land* (2/19-2/25)

Precis 4 due 2/23

Discussion 5, initial posts due 2/24, replies due 2/25

Midterm Journal opens 2/25

Module 6: John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (2/26-3/4)

Precis 5 due 3/2

Discussion 6, initial posts due 3/3, replies due 3/4

Module 7: Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue* (3/5-3/11)

Precis 6 due 3/9

Discussion 7, initial posts due 3/10, replies due 3/11

Midterm Journal closes 3/11

Module 8: William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis* (3/12-3/25)

Precis 7 due 3/23

Discussion 6, initial posts due 3/24. Replies due 3/25

Module 9: Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire* (3/26-4/1)

Precis 8 due 3/30

Discussion 9, initial posts due 3/31, replies due 4/1

Module 10: Richard White, *Railroaded* (4/2-4/15)

Precis 9 due 4/13

Discussion 10, initial posts due 4/14, replies due 4/15

Module 11: Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America* (4/16-4/29)

Precis 10 due 4/27

Discussion 11, initial posts due 4/28, replies due 4/29

Module 12: Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land* (4/30-5/6)

Precis 11 due 5/4

Discussion 12, initial posts due 5/5, replies due 5/6