History 257

Westward Bound: The West in American History

Fall 2008
Professor Lee

3 SS CD
This course can be taken for credits in CAS
MWF 9:00-9:50 King 337

Office hours and location:
Tuesday and Wednesday 10:00:-11:00 (or schedule appointment)
King 141-F
Email: shelley.lee@oberlin.edu

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course provides an introduction to the history of, and historical approaches to studying, the American West, with emphases on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will trace the West’s historical transformation from a perceived “wilderness” ripe for Anglo conquest to a consummately modern region that sets trends followed by the rest of the world. Through tracing this narrative, we will also consider multiple points of view and explore how factors like race, class, gender, sexuality, ideology, and place have shaped different experiences and understandings of the region’s significance, strengths, and problems. Three broad questions will guide us in our study: What are the key markers and meanings of “Western distinctiveness” in American history? In what ways have nation-building and national power been promoted and resisted by people in the region? Why does the imagined West—as deployed in a range of media and encompassing images from the “wilderness” to the “sexual frontier”—figure prominently in discussions of American exceptionalism and character?
Coverage of key events, people and trends that have shaped the American West will be broad, encompassing research in social, cultural, political, and environmental histories. Additionally, the course’s focus on historical sources and methods will call on students to analyze primary documents ranging from memoirs to poems, critically assess secondary sources written by professional historians, and demonstrate facility in discussing and writing about both kinds of materials. Because the course aims, in addition to surveying the history of the West, to explaining the construction and enduring power of myths about the region, popular culture and cultural history (covering areas such as western films), will be especially highlighted.

We will meet three days per week. Monday and Wednesday meetings will usually consist of a lecture and some discussion. You are expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned reading for each day. Friday meetings will be devoted to discussion, films, and/or exams. Assignments and in-class exams will call on students to demonstrate mastery of historical knowledge as well as critical thinking and clear expression through engagement with primary as well as secondary sources.

REQUIREMENTS

Required Texts (available at Oberlin Bookstore):


Pablo Mitchell, *Coyote Nation: Sexuality, Race, and Conquest in Modernizing New Mexico, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 2005)

Josh Sides, *LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (California, 2004)


*Other required readings are available on Blackboard. Look under “Course Documents” or link to the readings through the “Syllabus” page.*

Grading

Final grades are calculated from a possible total of 200 points.

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*Final grades will be determined based on the following components:*

**Attendance and punctuality (10 points, 5% of final grade).** Attendance is required. Class begins promptly at 9:00 and ends at 9:50. At the start of each class, I will make announcements and circulate an attendance sheet from which you will check your name. It is your responsibility to make sure you have
checked your name, as this will be my only record of attendance that I will use to calculate this portion of your grade. You are allowed three unpenalized absences, and each additional absence will result in a deduction of 3 points from your final grade. Excessive tardiness will be counted as absences.

In-class participation (10 points, 5% of final grade). This portion of your grade is evaluated on demonstrated preparation, thoughtfulness of contribution, regularity of participation, and respectfulness of your classmates and the instructor. You will be evaluated twice for participation during the term, on a 5-point scale, once after Week 7 and then after Week 15. These scores will be combined and then computed into your final grade.

Blackboard postings (2 points each, 10% of final grade). You are required to post TEN times during the semester. In your postings, you should, in one or two paragraphs, thoughtfully respond to the assigned reading for a given date, explaining what you found interesting, how the author illuminates some aspect of western history, and posing a question raised by the reading that you would like to discuss in class. To receive credit, you must post by midnight the day before class. You can access the discussion group through the “Communications” tab in the course website on Blackboard.

Three in-class quizzes (20 points each, 30% of final grade). These are meant to ensure that you are keeping up with reading and lectures. The format will be a combination of short answer and identifications and should take no more than 25 minutes to complete. Class discussion will follow on test days.

Paper #1 (10 points, 5% of final grade). Drawing on a list that will be provided, you will view and write a paper, no longer than two pages, on a recent film about the American West, discussing the myths and popular perceptions that it deploys and how it utilizes western tropes to comment on contemporary issues and concerns. As an initial assignment, this is meant to be a warm-up to a longer and more rigorous analysis of a historically significant western film, which you will complete later in the term. This will also provide me with an initial sample of your writing and opportunity to give suggestions to incorporate in future work. Due September 19 in class.

Paper #2 (40 points, 20% of final grade). You will view and write a 5-6 page paper on a film produced during one of the “golden eras” of the western genre in cinema during the twentieth century. For this assignment you must analyze the film and discuss it in terms of the era in which it was produced, drawing on course themes and materials and at least one review written at the time of its release. Further instructions and guidelines will be given in class. Due November 24 in class.

Paper #3 (50 points, 25% of final grade). You will write a 7-8 page review essay in which you pair Coyote Nation, LA City Limits, or The Organic Machine with another text. I will provide a list of books from which you can choose, or you can come up with your own selection, though you should let me know in advance to ensure its appropriateness for this assignment. In addition to comparing and contrasting the books, you must discuss how they engage and thereby illuminate your understanding of a theme in western history, which may include, but is not limited to, the frontier, borderlands, whiteness, migration, civil rights, and the environment. You will be expected to make your book selections by December 8. Further details and guidelines will be given in class. Paper is due December 19 by 2:00 PM.

Grades for the coursework will be based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of course materials, and quality of expression. Generally, I do not grant extensions or give makeup exams, and late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late. I may make an exception if you speak with me well before a due date.

HONOR CODE
By enrolling in this class you are agreeing to abide by Oberlin’s Honor Code and Honor System. Be sure you have read and understood your rights and responsibilities.
SPECIAL NEEDS
I will make every effort to accommodate the needs of students with physical or learning disabilities. Do see me as soon as possible to discuss any modifications that might be necessary.

OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACTING ME
The best way to contact me about discussing course matters is to come to office hours. I strongly encourage each of you to visit at least once during the term, if only to introduce yourself. You may contact me via email, and I will do my best to reply in a timely manner, though I usually do not check email after 10:00PM.
SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND BEGINNINGS

Sept. 3  Course introduction

Sept. 5  Indians and Empires
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 7-38)

WEEK 2: THE NEW NATION AND NEW ENCOUNTERS

Sept. 8  Independence and western territory
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 39-79)

Sept. 10 American imperialism and native-white encounters
         Reading: White, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-29)

Sept. 12 Discussion: Contact narratives
         In preparation for discussion, read “Buckskin Charlie Recounts Southern Ute Creation,”
         “Chippewa Contact Narrative,” and “Wolf Calf Describes Arrival of Horses” (primary documents)

WEEK 3: “MANIFEST DESTINY”: WEALTH, GOD, AND NATION

Sept. 15 Manifest Destiny and the politics of expansion
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 7 (pp. 80-93); “Great Nation of Futurity” (primary document)

Sept. 17 Gold: Prelude to exploitation
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 8 (pp. 94-108); Johnson, “Domestic Life in the Diggings”

Sept. 19 Museum visit: Art of the Cheyenne exhibit, Allen Art Museum
         We will split into groups for 30-minute sessions with Jason Trimmer, who will give a tour of the new “Art of the Cheyenne” exhibit on late 19th century Cheyenne drawings and beadwork
         PAPER #1 DUE

WEEK 4: TAMING THE LAND

Sept. 22 Technology and access
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 9 (pp. 109-120); White, Chapter 2 (pp. 30-58)

Sept. 24 “Open” range
         Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapters 10-11 (pp. 121-146); Smith, “Single Women Homesteaders”

Sept. 26 Discussion: Violence and the frontier
         In preparation read “Chinese Accounts of Rock Springs,” “Helen Wiser Stewart Writes of Her Husband’s Murder,” “Theodore Roosevelt Describes Cowboy Land” (primary documents)
WEEK 5: ALL THROWN TOGETHER: MOVEMENT AND MIGRATION

Sept. 29 Internal migrations
Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 12 (pp. 147-162); Painter, "Millenarian Aspects of the Exodus to Kansas of 1879"

Oct. 1 Western xenophobia and the beginnings of the American gate-keeping
Reading: Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example"; "Editor Henry George Supports Chinese Exclusion" (primary document)

Oct. 3 QUIZ #1

WEEK 6: THE BOUNDARIES OF RACE, GENDER, AND CITIZENSHIP

Oct. 6 Fluidity of race and gender in the "frontier"
Reading: Johnson, "Bulls, Bears, and Dancing Boys"; Peter Boag "Go West Young Man, Go East Young Woman"

Oct. 8 Reform and Americanization
Reading: Mitchell, Chapter 2 (pp. 26-51)

Oct. 10 Primary source discussion: Agency and the "other"
In preparation for discussion read the documents, "Why am I a Heathen?" "First Impressions of Civilization," and "Helen Mar Whitney Defends Plural Marriage" (primary documents)

WEEK 7: MOVING TOWARD MODERNITY

Oct. 13 The displacement of Hispanos and Californios in the borderlands
Reading: Mitchell, Chapters 1, 3, 4 (pp. 1-25, 52-100)

Oct. 15 The white man’s Indian: changing images of Native peoples
Reading: Mitchell, Chapters 5-7 (pp. 101-173)

Oct. 17 Book discussion: Coyote Nation and the historical monograph
Reading: Chapter 8 (pp. 174-183)

WEEK 8: ***FALL RECESS--NO CLASSES***

WEEK 9: THE END OF THE FRONTIER AND A NEW WEST EMERGING

Oct. 27 Myths and modernity
Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 15 (pp. 191-203); Excerpts from Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and “The Problem of the West” (primary documents)

Oct. 29 Modern marvels, modern problems
Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 13 (pp. 163-176); Benton-Cohen, “Docile Children and Dangerous Revolutionaries”

Oct. 31 Looking back: Western nostalgia at the turn of the century
In preparation for discussion, read “The Passing of the Cowboy”; “Davy Crockett and the Most Desperate Defense in American History” (primary documents)

**WEEK 10: CONFRONTING THE LIMITS OF WESTERN ABUNDANCE**

Nov. 3  The New Deal in the West  
Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 14 (pp. 176-190); White, Chapter 3 (pp. 58-88)

Nov. 5  Struggling at the bottom  
Reading: Gregory, “The Okie Problem”; Sides, Chapter 1 (pp. 11-35)

Nov. 7  QUIZ #2

**WEEK 11: WATERSHED OF WORLD WAR II**

Nov. 10  Mobilizing for war  
Reading: Sides, Chapters 2-3 (pp. 36-94); Uchida, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-25)

Nov. 12  Race and the war  
Reading: Uchida, Chapters 2-6 (pp. 26-101)

Nov. 14  Book discussion: Memoirs and history  
Reading: Uchida, Chapters 7-8 (pp. 102-145)

**WEEK 12: THE COLD WAR AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE WEST**

Nov. 17  The national tilt toward the West  
Reading: Hine and Faragher, Chapter 6 (pp. 204-225); Rugh, “Branding Utah”

Nov. 19  Prosperity and exclusion  
Reading: Sides, Chapters 4-5 (pp. 95-168)

Nov. 21  The western craze in postwar culture  
In preparation for discussion read “A Sinatra in a Sombrero” and “It’s Go Western for Young Men” (primary documents)

**WEEK 13: CALIFORNIA DREAMING?**

Nov. 24  Urban crisis and diminished dreams  
Reading: Sides, Chapter 6 (pp. 169-197)  
PAPER#2 DUE

Nov. 26  White flight, spatial inequity, and the origins of the New Right  
Reading: Avila, "Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight”; Fairbanks, "Failure of Urban Renewal in the Southwest"

Nov. 28  NO CLASS
WEEK 14: THE “LEFT COAST” AND THE WEST’S PLACE IN ‘60s COUNTERCULTURE

Dec. 1  The Left and radical politics
Reading: Self, “To Plan Our Liberation”; “San Francisco: How to Wreck a Campus” and “Urban Campus Prototype” (primary documents)

Dec. 3  The “sexual frontier”
Reading: Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District in San Francisco”

Dec. 5  Counterculture, pop culture and appropriating the West
In preparation for discussion read Allen, “I Just Want to Be a Cosmic Cowboy”


Dec. 8  Sagebrush and salmon
Reading: White, Chapter 4 (pp. 88-113); Cawley, “The Sagebrush Rebellion and Environmental Politics”

Dec. 10  Dystopia and LA’s visions of doom
Reading: Davis, “Beyond Blade Runner”

Dec. 12  QUIZ #3

PAPER #3 DUE FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2:00 PM

**The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. I will notify you in class and via Blackboard of any updates.**