History 257
Westward Bound: The West in American History
Spring 2008
Instructor: Shelley Lee

3 SS CD
This course can be taken for units in CAS

MWF 11:00-11:50
AJLC 120

Office hours and location:
T 8:30-10:00 and W 4:30-5:30 (or by appointment)
King 141-F
Email: shelley.lee@oberlin.edu

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This class provides an introduction to the history of, as well as historical approaches to studying, the American West, with a chronological emphasis on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We will consider some of the ways in which the “West”—as a place and process—has not only figured prominently in American nation-building and national identity formation, but also sheds light on transnational aspects of North American history. In addition to examining such seminal western moments as the Mexican-American War, the California gold rush, and the building of the transcontinental railroad, we aim to achieve an understanding of western history that takes into account the region’s complexity, diversity, and contradictions. Toward this end, we will pay close attention to how dynamics of race, gender, sexuality, and class have shaped the development of the American West and the lives of its inhabitants. We will also discuss the construction of western myths and why commentators, both past and present, so often look to this region for evidence of American exceptionalism. Thus, another objective of this class will be to untangle history from myth while also appreciating the ways in which images of the West—from the wilderness to the “California Dream”—have become cultural forces in and of themselves.

Course materials were selected with the aim of introducing students to critical themes and approaches in western history, including the environment, place, institutions, politics, and
autobiography. Assignments and in-class exams will challenge students to demonstrate mastery of historical knowledge as well as critical thinking and clear expression through engagement with primary as well as secondary sources.

We will meet three days a week. Our Monday and Wednesday meetings will usually consist of a lecture and discussion. You are expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned reading for each day. Our Friday meetings will be devoted to group discussion, films, exams, or guest speakers.

**REQUIREMENTS**

Grade breakdown:

**Attendance and participation (10%).** More than three absences will negatively impact your final grade. The same goes for repeated tardiness.

**Blackboard postings (10%).** Identify and discuss three ideas, events, or individuals that stood out to you in the week’s reading assignment. You need not provide an elaborate definition, but do explain why this is an important term/idea in the history of the West. You may post at any point during the week before Thursday, midnight. You are required to post FIVE times during the semester. You can access the discussion group through the “Communications” tab in the course website.

**Midterm (20%).** In-class blue book exam on material covered through Week 7. March 21.

**Film review (15%).** You will write on a film about the American West (time period and genre are open) and write a 3-4 page scholarly critical review of the film. Examples and further details will be provided in class. Due March 7.

**Book review (15%).** You will write a 3-4 page scholarly review of one of the following books: Coyote Nation, Suburban Warriors, Desert Exile, or Organic Machine. Due May 2.

**Final exam (30%)** Exam will be cumulative but with greater emphasis on material from the second half of the semester. May 15, 7:00-9:00.

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.

**Required Texts (available at Oberlin Bookstore):**


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


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

**OBERLIN 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. You should make sure you are familiar with the Honor Code and Honor system. You can find it at this link: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-reg07-08/honorcode.pdf.

**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 what steps need to be taken and 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: MAJOR THEMES IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Feb. 4        Course introduction
Feb. 6        The struggles of empires
Feb. 8        Exploration and early impressions
               Reading: Limerick, Legacy of Conquest, Chapter 1; White, Organic Machine, Chapter 1

WEEK 2: THE SETTLING OF THE WEST

Feb. 11       The politics and economy of westward expansion
               Reading: Limerick, Legacy of Conquest, Chapters 2-3
Feb. 13       God, land, and wealth: human motivations in going West
               Reading: Limerick, Legacy of Conquest, Chapter 4
Feb. 15       Discussion: Manifest Destiny and the contradictions of empire

WEEK 3: ROUGHING IT: SOCIETIES OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Feb. 18       Life in the mining frontier
               Reading: Johnson, “Domestic Life in the Diggings” and “Bulls, Bears and Dancing Boys”
Feb. 20       A most unromantic life: Women in the West
               Reading: Pfaelzer, “The Woman’s Tale”
Feb. 22       Discussion: Untangling myth from reality in the frontier period

WEEK 4: CAPITALISM AND MIGRATION

Feb. 25       Economics, machines, and nature
               Reading: White, Organic Machine, Chapter 2
Feb. 27       Race, labor, and conflict
               Reading: Limerick, Legacy of Conquest, Chapter 8
Feb. 29       Discussion: The significance of the transcontinental railroad
WEEK 5: NATIVE AMERICANS

March 3  Displacement and persistence in the 19th century
Reading: Limerick, <i>Legacy of Conquest</i> Chapter 6; Reading: Mitchell, <i>Coyote Nation</i>, Chapter 2

March 5  Indians in surprising places and the national imagination
Reading: Thrush, “The Changers, Changed”

March 7  Discussion: The centrality of Indian iconography in the West and the nation
FILM REVIEW DUE

WEEK 6: SEARCHING FOR ORDER IN THE AMERICAN BORDERLANDS

Mar. 10  Migration, interracial contact and contestation
Reading: Limerick, <i>Legacy of Conquest</i> Chapter 7; Mitchell, <i>Coyote Nation</i>, Chapters 1, 3, 4

Mar. 12  Triumph of Anglo power
Reading: Mitchell, <i>Coyote Nation</i>, Chapters 5-7

Mar. 14  Visit from Pablo Mitchell, Professor of History and Director of Comparative American Studies, Oberlin
Reading: Mitchell, <i>Coyote Nation</i>, Chapter 8

WEEK 7: THE TRANS-PACIFIC WEST

Mar. 17  The significance of Chinese immigration in the creation of borders
Reading: Lee, “Enforcing the Borders”

Mar. 19  The West as Japan’s frontier
Reading: Azuma, “The Politics of Transnational History Making”

Mar. 21  MIDTERM EXAM

WEEK 8: ***SPRING BREAK--NO CLASSES***

WEEK 9: A NEW WEST EMERGING

Mar. 31  Looking to the past and future: tourism, and new western myths
Reading: Hafen, “City of Saints, City of Sinners”; Imada, “Hawaiians on Tour”

Apr. 2  Engineers and harnessing nature
Reading: White, <i>Organic Machine</i>, Chapters 3 and 4
Apr. 4  Discussion: The beginning of the modern West?

WEEK 10: THE GREAT DEPRESSION: A WEST OF CONTRASTS

Apr. 7  Hardship and federal intervention  
        Reading: Gregory, "Out of the Heartland" and "The Okie Problem"

Apr. 9  Sex and leisure in the 1930s  
        Reading: Maram, "White Trash and Brown Hordes"

Apr. 11 Discussion: The legacy of the New Deal and the Depression-era West in popular culture

WEEK 11: THE CENTER OF THE STORM: THE WEST DURING WWII

Apr. 14 Industry, new migrations, and general strikes  
        Reading: Uchida, Desert Exile, Chapters 1-3

Apr. 16 Race and civil rights during the war  
        Reading: Uchida, Desert Exile, Chapters 4 and 5; Guglielmo, “Fighting for Caucasian Rights”

Apr. 18 The internment of Japanese Americans  
        Reading: Uchida, Desert Exile, Chapters 6-8

WEEK 12: THE WEST DURING THE COLD WAR AND CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Apr. 21 Deindustrialization and urban blight  
        Reading: Sides, “Straight into Compton”

Apr. 23 White flight and suburbanization  
        Reading: McGirr, Suburban Warriors, Chapters 1-2

Apr. 25 Discussion: The origins of the new right  
        Reading: McGirr, Suburban Warriors, Chapters 3-4


Apr. 28 Revolution and counterrevolution  
        Reading: McGirr, Suburban Warriors, Chapters 5-6

Apr. 30 The sexual frontier?  
        Reading: Sides, “Excavating the Postwar Sex District”
May 2  Discussion: West Coast, the cultural vanguard
BOOK REVIEW DUE

WEEK 14  UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA ON THE WEST COAST

May 5  Western cities go national
Reading: Abbott, “From Regional Cities to National Cities, 1950-1990”; O’Mara, “From the Farm to the Valley”

May 7  Fortress LA and other dystopian visions
Reading: Mike Davis, “Fortress LA”

May 9  Final thoughts

***FINAL EXAM THURSDAY, MAY 15, 7:00-9:00PM***