Overview of class

Whether you were born and grew up in the United States or not, you’ve probably encountered the ‘myth of the frontier’ in books, movies, computer games, in history classes at school, on the playground, or in talking with friends and family. By ‘myth of the frontier’, I mean the story about how the United States became a continental empire by expanding westwards. The myth is peopled by characters we know well: cowboys and Indians; big land speculators and small homesteaders; federal agents, local sheriffs, and vigilantes. These characters are national heroes or anti-heroes and they continue to serve as reference points and symbols for the nation. We have been reminded of that very recently: the code-name given to the operation to find Osama bin Laden was ‘Geronimo’, after the nineteenth-century Apache leader; and the Navy SEALs who were sent to the walled compound in Abbotabad flew there in ‘Blackhawk’ helicopters.

The ‘myth of the frontier’, as we will find out in this course, is often historically inaccurate and glosses over more than it reveals about the actual colonization of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa—all places where that myth has had particular purchase. But it does sustain a sense of what it means to belong to the nation in those countries, politically and socially. We have to take the myth seriously, therefore, even if we might decide that we want to undo or complicate some of the assumptions that give it power. In this class, we will undertake to understand why the myth of the frontier has had such powerful impact in the making and memorializing of predominantly English-speaking settler societies. We will discover that there are, in fact, plural myths of the frontier and that these myths tell us something about what is distinct about nation-building in different regions and in different time periods. We will also seek to complicate those myths of the frontier by examining lesser-known stories about settler colonial expansion. To this end, we will focus in particular on the relations and interactions between Anglophone settlers and indigenous people as settler colonial states expanded through the nineteenth-century.
Readings

Text to purchase (available from University Bookstore)
ISBN: 9780771080302

Course pack (available from the Humanities Copy Center, 1650 Humanities Building)


Structure of class and learning goals

This class is a transnational history class. That means that the class goes beyond national borders to seek answers to the questions that we have posed (why is the myth of the frontier so important, in national terms? what does that myth leave out or gloss over?). The regions whose histories we will touch upon include North America (primarily, the United States and Canada); Southern Africa (primarily what is now South Africa); and the South Pacific (primarily Australia and New Zealand). These places are distinct but they are also connected because of the migration patterns of English-speaking colonists who settled the ‘frontiers’ on mass in the nineteenth-century.

The class is organized thematically and somewhat chronologically. We begin with an examination of two significant myths of the frontier, the notion of ‘manifest destiny’ and the idea of the ‘fatal shore’. We then go on to examine how stories of the frontier can be told in different terms and, indeed, have been experienced in ways that neither the narratives of manifest destiny nor the fatal shore allow for. Topics to be covered include: the fur trade in Canada as a ‘contact zone’; indigenous empires; wars of colonization; settlements and homesteading; gold rushes and resource exploitation. We conclude the class by thinking more directly about why the myth of the frontier is so important to the settler nations we have discussed in earlier parts of the class.

This class will not make you an expert in the histories of the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand or South Africa. Nor do I expect you to have much prior knowledge of these places. What I hope you will learn in this class is how to connect the historical experiences and narratives of peoples you might not usually think of as linked; and how to think critically about those connections. To this end, the key word, or rather key activity, for doing well in the class will be: question! As you will see from the schedule below, I will be lecturing twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. Those lectures will be interactive: I expect you to question me and each other during the period of the lecture. That is the way that we will all learn the most from each other and develop a shared pool of knowledge. Friday sessions will be devoted to small group activities, writing workshops, and a number of class visits on and off campus.

Assignments and grading

Assessment for this class is broken down into a series of short and varied assignments. You may feel more comfortable with some assignments more than others; that’s ok just try your best and ask me and other students in the class if you don’t understand something. As you will see from the schedule and the table of assignments and due dates below, there is one group assignment,
three writing assignments, a primary source assignment an oral presentation, and finally a take-home exam. I will provide more details about each of the assignments and a grading rubric a week or so before it is due. This information will be posted on the Learn@UW site under ‘course information’.

You must let me know before class if you cannot attend and provide evidence for non-attendance. I may ask you to provide me with written answers for that week’s reading in lieu of attendance in class. Attendance and participation in class counts for 10% of your grade. That could mean the difference between an A or an AB; a B or a BC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Percentage of total grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation:</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small-group assignment</td>
<td>Friday September 16th</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st writing assignment</td>
<td>Friday September 30th</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd writing assignment</td>
<td>Monday October 17th</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd writing assignment</td>
<td>Monday November 7th</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation and written summary</td>
<td>Monday-Friday Nov 28th-Dec 2nd</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-home exam</td>
<td>Friday December 16th</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Other resources and issues

A fellow from the Writing Center will come and talk to us about what the center has to offer students. They will also co-teach a class on essay writing. I encourage you all to make use of this wonderful resource on campus where you can get individualized feedback on your writing: [http://www.writing.wisc.edu/](http://www.writing.wisc.edu/)

We will talk about correct referencing and style issues in class. You can find more information and help through Madcat: [http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/citing](http://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/citing)

Disability guidelines for course accommodations may be found at the UW McBurney Disability Resource Center site: [http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/](http://www.mcburney.wisc.edu/).

Student codes of conduct may be found here: [http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html#points](http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html#points)
Schedule

Week one

Friday September 2nd: Introduction to the class

Week two


Monday September 5th: NO CLASS: Labor Day

Wednesday September 7th: Introductory lecture

Friday September 9th: Finding North America, Southern Africa, and the South Pacific (small group activity using online encyclopedias and other e-resources)

Week three: Frontier regions: a brief history

Reading: Levine, ‘Settling the “New World”’ and ‘After America’

Monday September 12th: Lecture

Wednesday September 14th: Lecture

Friday September 16th: Lecture/group work

Small-group assignment: produce a select list of useful websites and e-resources for the region/country your group is assigned. You should note on the list the name of the website; the sponsoring organization; the URL; and why you think it is useful. How do you know whether the information collected and conveyed on the site is reliable and trustworthy? You might like to point out specific categories of information that the website covers, links to primary sources, image collections, and other matters of interest to the class. Are there areas or categories that the website does not cover that you think it should? Due Friday September 16th 5pm.

Week four: The frontier as ‘manifest destiny’?

Reading: Turner, ‘The significance of the frontier in American history’
Rhodes, ‘Confession of Faith’

Monday September 19th: Lecture

Wednesday September 21st: Lecture

Friday September 23rd: Paraphrasing Turner (small group activity)

Week five: Or the frontier as ‘fatal environment’?

Reading: ‘The Wild Colonial Boy’ and ‘Immigration’
Hirst, *Freedom on the Fatal Shore*

See also:  

Monday September 26\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture  
Wednesday September 28\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture  
Friday September 30\textsuperscript{th}: Peer-review writing workshop

First writing assignment (10%): in one paragraph (maximum 250 words), explain the CENTRAL difference between the concept of ‘manifest destiny’ as described by Frederick Jackson Turner, and the notion of the ‘fatal shore’ as discussed in lectures and the readings for week five. Due Friday September 30\textsuperscript{th}, 5pm.

Week six: Contact zones and borderlands: a case study of the fur trade

Reading: Siggins, *Marie-Anne*, parts 1 and 2 (pp. 3-184)

Monday October 3\textsuperscript{rd}: Lecture  
Wednesday October 5\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture  
Friday October 7\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Week seven: The fur-trade continued

Reading: Siggins continued, part 3 and epilogue (pp. 185-264)

Monday October 10\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture  
Wednesday October 12\textsuperscript{th}: Museum session  
Friday October 14\textsuperscript{th}: Second peer-review writing workshop

Second writing assignment (15%): using one of the artefacts we find in the Wisconsin Historical Museum’s fur trade exhibit, and drawing on the story of Marie-Anne as well as information you have gleaned from the e-resources we analyzed in weeks two and three, write an imaginative account of the life of that artefact in the fur trade, 2 pages maximum. Due Monday October 17\textsuperscript{th}, 5pm

Week eight: Frontiers of settlement

Reading: Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*  
Irvine and Alpers, ‘The Public Works Policy and the Abolition of the Provinces‘  
History of immigration in New Zealand, text and documents available at:  

Monday October 17\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture
Wednesday October 19\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Friday October 21\textsuperscript{st}: Small-group discussion

\textbf{Week nine: The rise of indigenous empires: an alternative frontier history}

\textit{Reading}: Hamalainen, ‘The Empire of the Plains’
   Saukamappee

Monday October 24\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Wednesday October 26\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Friday October 28\textsuperscript{th}: Skills workshop with writing fellow from the Writing Center

\textbf{Week ten: Wars of colonization and the fall of indigenous empires}

\textit{Reading}: Hamalainen, ‘Collapse’
   Gump, ‘A Spirit of Resistance’
   Parewhanake, ‘The Land’

Monday October 31\textsuperscript{st}: Lecture

Wednesday November 2\textsuperscript{nd}: Lecture

Friday November 4\textsuperscript{th}: Third peer-review writing workshop

\textit{Third writing assignment (15\%)}: 2 page essay, topic TBA. \textit{Due Monday November 7\textsuperscript{th}, 5pm.}

\textbf{Week eleven: Law and (dis)order on the frontier}

\textit{Reading}: Karsten, ‘Cows in the corn’
   White, ‘Outlaw gangs’

Monday November 7\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Wednesday November 9\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Friday November 11\textsuperscript{th}: Visit to the Wisconsin Historical Society

\textbf{Week twelve: Unsettled frontiers: gold rushes}

\textit{Reading}: Johnson, ‘Domestic Life in the Diggings’ and ‘Bulls, Bears and Dancing Boys’
   ‘Letters to Tsi Chow-Choo’

Monday November 14\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Wednesday November 16\textsuperscript{th}: Lecture

Friday November 18\textsuperscript{th}: NO CLASS: research time at library: find an interesting primary source that you would like to present to the class.
Week thirteen: Diamonds, empire and war

Reading: Thompson, ‘Diamonds, gold and British Imperialism’
Van den Berg, ‘Journal of the War’

Monday November 21st: Lecture

Wednesday November 23rd: NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

Friday November 25th: NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

Week fourteen: Oral presentations

Fourth assignment (20%): oral presentations of primary sources to classmates and one page summary to be handed in to professor after class

Monday November 28th: Oral presentations

Wednesday November 30th: Oral presentations

Friday December 2nd: Oral presentations

Week fifteen: Empire and Frontier Nationalism

Reading: Penny, ‘Australia’s Reaction to the Boer War’
Bleszynski, ‘Rebel with a cause?’
Find recent discussion of possibility of a pardon for Breaker Morant in South African and Australian media sources

Monday December 5th: Lecture

Wednesday December 7th: Watch Breaker Morant

Friday December 9th: Watch Breaker Morant

Week sixteen: Myths of the frontier

Reading: Slotkin, ‘Buffalo Bill’s “Wild West”’

Monday December 12th: Discussion of film in terms of class themes and questions

Wednesday December 14th: Wrap-up

Take-home exam (20%): essay question to be provided in-class on Monday December 12th. Due Friday 16th at 5pm.