This seminar is designed to introduce you to the historiography of what many have called the American West. But the places we study here have long been contested by a variety of peoples—residents, migrants, politicians, image makers, travelers, activists, and, of course, historians. So we also will have occasion to talk about places called by such names as El Norte, the frontier, the borderlands, the North American West, the Canadian West, the Mexican North, Gam Saan, the Pacific Rim, the Pacific World, the West Coast, the Great West, the Middle Place, Aztlan, and, simply, home. In addition, we will have occasion to talk about when, and where, and how, and why regional distinctiveness fades or changes form and meaning. We will be reminded constantly that there is power in naming.

Course requirements

1. General: Faithful attendance, careful completion of weekly readings before class meets, interactive and respectful participation in discussion. Class is a place for collective learning, and collective learning requires both active listening and thoughtful speaking. If you must miss a class meeting, please inform me well in advance (unless you face an emergency, of course), and we'll work out an alternative assignment for you to complete for that day (which will probably take you longer to complete than it would take you to prepare for and attend the scheduled class). Please try not to miss any class meetings.

2. Cofacilitation: Most weeks, one of you will serve as cofacilitator for class discussion. In the week that you cofacilitate, you'll also read and report on one of the supplemental texts assigned. Your report should last no more than 10 minutes, and it should serve as both an introduction to the book you've read and as a discussion-launcher for the reading assigned to the whole class. So, you'll need to make connections between the reading you've done on your own and the assigned weekly reading.

3. Written work: You will write two kinds of papers for this class.

   First, you will write a 2-3 page (500-750 word) book review of one of the books assigned to the class as a whole (of the style you might find in American Historical Review, Journal of American History, Western Historical Quarterly, or Pacific Historical Review). Try to choose a book that you are not likely to consider in depth in your second paper. This paper should be double-spaced, with standard one-inch margins. It should have no grammatical or typographical errors or misspellings (that’s right: none at all). When in doubt, please consult: William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, Elements of Style, 4th ed.; and Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed. (If you don’t own these reference works, I suggest that you purchase them, as you’ll use them throughout your career.) Your review is due on Friday, March 7, by 4 p.m. in my mailbox.

   Your second paper will be a 13-15 page (3250 to 3750 word) historiographical essay that situates an issue or controversy of recent and current concern to western historians in relation to scholarship that has addressed similar issues or controversies before the 1990s. You are encouraged to think comparatively (across regions) and transnationally (across national borders). You should begin by identifying book- and article-length scholarship relevant to your topic. Please discuss your interests with me before Spring Break, and turn in a complete bibliography by Friday, March 28, at 4 p.m. The completed essay is due on Friday, April 25, at 4 p.m. Unless you turn in a perfect paper, expect to receive this draft back with my comments in class on Tuesday, May 6. You will have until Tuesday, May 13, at 4 p.m. to revise your paper and turn it in to my mailbox. Your historiographical essay should be double-spaced, with standard one-inch
margins. It should have no grammatical or typographical errors or misspellings (that’s right: none at all). It should include footnotes or endnotes, and a formal bibliography. Please use the standard humanities style of documentation as detailed in Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed., or *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (If you don’t own one of these guides, I suggest that you purchase one, as you’ll use it throughout your graduate career.)

*A note about scholarly writing*: In the interests of full disclosure, I must make two confessions. First, in a former life, I worked as an editor in scholarly publishing. Second, and more important, I simply love writing: the sound and feel of words, the rhythm and texture of a sentence. As a result, I’m a stickler for clear, evocative prose that invites readers in rather than shuts them out. So I pay close attention to the form, as well as the content, of scholarly writing. Sometimes graduate students experience this attention as oppressive, and assume mistakenly that I’m *more* interested in form than content. Nothing could be further from the truth. What I want to encourage is writing that illuminates rather than obscures the intellectual content of your work. Still, it can be daunting to receive a paper back with ample editorial as well as analytical suggestions. I hope that you’ll consider my suggestions in the spirit in which they are given—as evidence of my deep engagement in your intellectual project and in your ongoing attempt to communicate that project effectively to your readers.

**Readings**

The following books can be purchased at the University Book Store, and are on reserve at College Library in Helen C. White Hall:


*The starred books above are assigned in pairs for March 11 and March 25. For these two class periods, we will divide the group in half, and each half will read just one of the books assigned. During the class period, each half of the class will “teach” the book they’ve read to their classmates.

Note: Within the first two weeks of class, I will add up to a half-dozen articles to this reading list and make those articles available to you electronically on the Learn@UW site for this class.

If you feel that you need some background in western history to supplement the assigned readings, you might consider the following overviews and collections:


If you need a reference work in western history, the very best is:

Calendar and Assignments

Jan. 22

Course introduction

Jan. 29  Middle Grounds

Reading:

Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*

Supplemental:


Feb. 5  Native Rules

Reading:

Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands*

Supplemental:


Feb. 12  Slaves of Empire

Reading:

James Brooks, *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands*

Supplemental:


Feb. 19  Bodies in Pain

Reading:

Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West*

Supplemental:


Feb. 26  City and Country

Reading:

William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*

Supplemental:


March 4  Colonial Encounters

Reading:

Jeffrey Ostler, *The Plains Sioux and U.S. Colonialism from Lewis and Clark to Wounded Knee*

Supplemental:


*Please turn in your first paper by 4 p.m. on Friday, March 7.*
March 11 1848 and Its Legacies

Reading:

*Susan Johnson, Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush

*Shelley Streeby, American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture

*See note under “Readings” above.

Supplemental:


Mary Murphy, Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

Laurie Mercier, Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

Please discuss your final paper with me before Spring Break.

March 25 The Health of the Nation

Reading:

*Natalia Molina, Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939

*Nayan Shah, Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown

*See note under “Readings” above.

Supplemental:


Phoebe Kropp, California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Please turn in the bibliography for your final paper by 4 p.m. on Friday, March 28.
April 1  Borders

Reading:

Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands*

Supplemental:


April 8  Fitting In

Reading:

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

Supplemental:


April 15  Queer Frontiers

Reading:

Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965*

Supplemental:


April 22  City and Suburb

Reading:
Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*

Supplemental:

*Please turn in a completed and polished draft of your final paper by 4 p.m. on Friday, April 25.*

April 29  Impossible Subjects

Reading:

Supplemental:

May 6

*I will return the completed and polished draft of your final paper in class, and we will discuss revisions collectively over breakfast.*

*Please turn in your revised and perfected final paper by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13.*