Seminar in the History of the American West

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 polities and peoples. 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 Gathering of the Waters, the Pacific Rim, the Pacific World, the Pacific Northwest, the Southwest, the Interior West, the Mountain West, the Great Basin, the Great Plains, the Great West, the Midwest, the Prairie West, the West Coast, the Left Coast, the Middle Place, Aztlan, and, simply, home. We will be reminded that there is power in naming. In addition, we will have occasion to talk about when, and where, and how, and why regional distinctiveness has faded or changed form and meaning. Our reading will begin in the nineteenth century, at the moment when the region that came to be called the American West began to take shape. We will then move back in time to consider the peoples and places that predated an American West, later returning to the nineteenth-century contests that created it. Finally, we will move into the twentieth century, when visions of the West shape-shifted constantly, like a kaleidoscope held in the hand of a curious child. Throughout, we will value such curiosity and strive to make it part of our historical practice.

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, illustrated by Maira Kalman; 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 Thursday, March 8, 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. Feel free 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 by Thursday, March 1, and
turn in a complete bibliography by Thursday, March 29, at 10 a.m. (in my mailbox). The completed essay
is due on Thursday, April 26, at 4 p.m. (in my mailbox). Unless you turn in a perfect paper, expect to
receive this draft back with my comments in class on Tuesday, May 8. You will have until Tuesday, May
15, 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 must 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, 16th 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. Please 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

These books can be purchased at the University Book Store and are on reserve at College Library:

Katherine Benton-Cohen, Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona

David Chang, The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-
1929 (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2010).


***Brian DeLay, War of a Thousand Deserts: Indian Raids and the U.S.-Mexican War (New Haven,
Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).

***Jennifer Nez Denetdale, Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and

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Anne Hyde, Empires, Nations, and Families: A History of the North American West, 1800-1860 (Lincoln:
Univ. of Nebraska Press, 2011).

***Margaret Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of
Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940 (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska
Press, 2009).

***Karl Jacoby, Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History (New York: Penguin,


***The starred books above are assigned in pairs for Feb. 21, March 6, and April 10. For these three class periods, we’ll 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. Thus, you’ll need to purchase only three of these six books. We’ll make the assignments the first day of class, so you may wish to hold off on these purchases until then.

*These articles can be accessed on the Learn@UW site for this course:*


Sherry Smith, “Reconciliation and Restitution in the American West,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Spring 2010).


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

Calendar and Assignments

Jan. 24
Course introduction

Jan. 31  Becoming the West: The People

Reading:
Ann Laura Stoler, “Intimations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen,” and “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post)Colonial Studies”

Supplemental:
Susan Sleeper-Smith, *Indian Women and French Men: Rethinking Cultural Encounter in the Western Great Lakes* (2001)

Feb. 7  Becoming the West: The Land

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

Supplemental:
Feb. 14  Homelands and Empires

Reading:

Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire*


Supplemental:


Feb. 21  Writing Indigenous Histories

Reading:

***Jennifer Nez Denetdale, Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita***

***Anton Treuer, Assassination of Hole in the Day***

Supplemental:

William Bauer, *We Were All Like Migrant Workers Here: Work, Community, and Memory on California’s Round Valley Reservation, 1850-1941* (2009)


Feb. 28  Borderland Peoples

Reading:

Raúl Ramos, *Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio, 1821-1861*

Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, “Making Transnational History: Nations, Regions, and Borderlands”

Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, “Telling Differences: The Forty-Ninth Parallel and Historiographies of the West and Nation”

Supplemental:


Please discuss your final paper with me by Thursday, March 1.

March 6  Taking Up Arms

Reading:


***Karl Jacoby, *Shadows at Dawn: An Apache Massacre and the Violence of History***

Supplemental:


Please turn in your first paper by 4 p.m. on Thursday, March 8.
March 13  Building the West

Reading:

Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*

Supplemental:

Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana’s Smelter City* (2001)

March 20  Home, Land, and Nation

Reading:

David Chang, *The Color of the Land: Race, Nation, and the Politics of Landownership in Oklahoma, 1832-1929*

Supplemental:

Marcia Weisiger, *Dreaming of Sheep in Navajo Country* (2009)
March 27  Ports of Entry

Reading:

Erika Lee and Judy Yung, Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America

Elizabeth Jameson, Margaret Jacobs, Susan Lee Johnson, and Karen Leong, “If Not Now, When?: Gender, Power, and the Decolonization of Western History”

Supplemental:


Catherine Ceniza Choy, Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino History (2003)

Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943 (2000)


Nayan Shah, Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown (2001)


Please turn in the bibliography for your final paper by 10 a.m. on Thursday, March 29.

April 10  Tender Ties, National and Transnational Landscapes

Reading:

***Margaret Jacobs, White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880-1940

***Nayan Shah, Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and Law in the North American West

Supplemental:

Peter Boag, Re-dressing America’s Frontier Past (2011)

Peter Boag, Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest (2003)


Eithne Luibheid, Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border (2002)

Peggy Pascoe, Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939 (1990)


Mark Rifkin, When Did Indians Become Straight? Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty (2011)
**April 17**  
**Border Peoples**

**Reading:**

Katherine Benton-Cohen, *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands*

Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill, “Borders and Their Historians in North America”

**Supplemental:**

Flannery Burke, *From Greenwich Village to Taos: Primitivism and Place at Mabel Dodge Luhan’s* (2008)  

**April 24**  
**Country, City, Suburb: Political Economies**

**Reading:**

Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*

**Supplemental:**


*Please turn in a completed and polished draft of your final paper by 4 p.m. on Thursday, April 26.*
May 1  City of Angels

Reading:

Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles*

Sherry Smith, “Reconciliation and Restitution in the American West”

Supplemental:


May 8

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

*Please turn in your revised and perfected final paper by 4 p.m. on Tuesday, May 15.*