

# On the Road: Wandering, History and the United States

HIST 600-009

Mosse Humanities Building, 5255

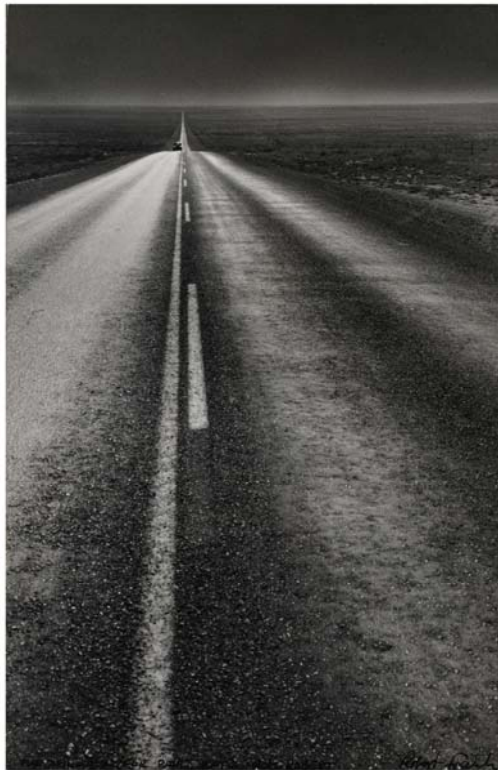
Wednesday, 3:30-5:25

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Office Hours: Monday and Tuesday, 10-Noon; and by appointment.



Robert Frank, *U.S. 285, New Mexico*, c. 1958.

Travel.

It is a deeply evocative word, at once a noun and a verb, that calls to mind a whole host of connotations, from excess (perhaps best summed up in the opening lines of Hunter S. Thompson's 1971 classic, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*: "We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold"), to morning-after regret (think of country star Hank Williams's 1949 *Lost Highway*: "Now I'm lost, too late to pray/Lord I paid the cost on the Lost Highway"); self-discovery (think of Jon Krakauer's 1996 *Into the Wild*, or perhaps your own study abroad); politics both radical (Henry David Thoreau's wish, in *Walking*, for a "A people who would begin by burning the fences and let the forests stand!"), and those more mainstream (Andrew Jackson's 1830 Maysville Road veto; Madison's bike lanes); cultural critique (Alexis De Toqueville's 1835-1840 *Democracy in America*)...we could continue to travel down this road endlessly. What seems clear is

that wandering—whether by foot, carriage, horse, bike, or via internal combustion engine—is thickly woven into the cultural history of the United States.

And so this seminar will saunter through the long history of travel in the U.S. Along the way, we'll pause to ask: why has travel assumed such a prominent place in American culture? How has travel been a way to know the self in relation to a larger political, physical, and social landscape? How has travel inflected the idea of America?

The class will have two phases to it: in the first, we'll proceed chronologically, from the 1830s to our present day, and we'll encounter a variety of both primary and secondary sources as we go: essays and books; music and film; painting and photography. In the second phase, the class will transform into an intensive writing and research workshop dedicated to helping you draft a 25-30 page research paper on a topic of your choice. You may choose to jump into the archives and work with manuscripts; or you may decide to explore published accounts. In either case, you will gain an understanding of how one crafts research questions, finds sources, uses them to one's best advantage, and puts them into dialogue with relevant secondary literature.

### **Rationale**

As the capstone research seminar to your career as a history major, this class has three primary goals: to deeply explore one particular facet of American culture; to dive into the pleasures (and, at times, agonies) of primary research; and to write an original paper that showcases both your research prowess and your craft as a writer.

By the end of this class, each of you should be on the path towards:

- A nuanced ability to evaluate primary texts and to integrate them with secondary sources.
- The ability to navigate both the physical and digital archives.
- Writing that is intellectually rigorous and artistically elegant.
- Gaining the skills and writerly endurance to revise, revise, revise.

### **Requirements**

Attendance at all classes is required (though if you must miss a class or postpone a paper due to personal illness, family needs, or the observance of a religious holiday, please let me know ahead of time. You will be responsible for keeping yourself up-to-date with the reading and writing assignments)!

Completing all the written work. YOU CANNOT PASS THIS CLASS IF YOU DO NOT HAND IN EVERY ASSIGNMENT.

Please come to class having done the reading carefully, and prepared to discuss.

### **Digital Gadgets**

Since many of our readings will be on Learn@UW, you will be allowed to use a laptop or tablet in class. You **MUST** bring the reading with you, and if you decide to bring digital versions, you must understand that you can only use your digital device **FOR REFERRING TO THE READINGS ONLY**. If it seems like anyone is using his or her laptop or tablet for shopping/facebook/news/poker/whatever, the whole class will be barred from using them, and we'll all go back to paper copies.

### **Grading**

Because this is a discussion-oriented class, your participation will be worth 30% of the final grade. We'll also have a variety of writing assignments, all of which will build toward the final paper:

- Wandering Reflection. 5% of the final grade each.
- Final Paper Pitch. 5% of the final grade.
- Final Paper Proposal. 20% of the final grade.
- Final Essay. 40% of the final grade.

### **Late Policy and Rewrite Policy**

Unless I have given you an extension, for every day that your paper is late, you'll be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e., B+ to B). You may rewrite any paper that scores less than a B, under two conditions: 1) you meet with me first, and 2) you hand in the rewrite no more than two weeks after I give back the initial paper.

### **Basic Paper Guidelines**

We'll talk about expectations much more in the coming weeks, but here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Citations. Plagiarism/academic dishonesty is nothing to fool around with: I take it very, very seriously. *Everything that you write for this class must represent your own original work and must have been written expressly for this class only.* A good rule of thumb is that you should cite anything that is not your own thought. If you had to look it up, cite it. (This doesn't hold for dates. If you can't remember exactly when Ansel Adams was first in Yosemite, and you consult the text to find the date, no need to cite that.) If you quote someone, cite it. If you paraphrase, cite it. In the end, it is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with U. Wisconsin-Madison's Academic Integrity Code which can be found online at: <http://students.wisc.edu/doso/students.html>. In this course, the normal penalty for a violation of the code is an "F" for the term.
- Use page numbers.
- Title your papers (be creative!), put your name on them, and the date.
- Use appropriate formatting: Times New Roman, 12 point, with regular margins and double-spaced lines is a good guideline.
- PROOFREAD. A *very* good way to do this is to read your paper out loud to yourself. You may feel silly doing it, but talking to yourself is a good indication of brilliance.
- I'll bump your grade by 2 points if, at the end of the semester, I find that you've printed everything either double-sided or on scrap paper.

### **University Policies and Regulations**

I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, visually and/or hearing impaired student; plagiarism; sexual harassment; and racial or ethnic discrimination. All students are advised to become familiar with the respective University regulations and are encouraged to bring any questions or concerns to my attention.

I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for students with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations should be made during the first three weeks of the semester, except in unusual circumstances, so that arrangements can be made. Students are encouraged to register with the Dean of Students Office to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

**Required Texts (also on reserve):**

Kerouac, Jack. *On the Road*.

Lasch, Christopher. *Plain Style*.

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*.

Momaday, N. Scott, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Tales*.

Sachs, Aaron. *The Humboldt Current: Nineteenth-Century Exploration and the Roots of American Environmentalism*.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*.

Sutter, Paul. *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*.

Articles on Learn@UW

**(Highly) Suggested Texts**

Turabian, Kate. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers*, 8th ed.

**Course Calendar**

**Week 1, 1/22:** “The Ancient Shudder”: On the Road in America.

**Week 2, 1/29:** What is America? Where is it? Whose is it?

Reading: Sally Hester, “The Diary of a Pioneer Girl,” and Louisiana Strentzel, “A Letter from California,” from *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails*; Henry David Thoreau, *Ktaadn*.

Writing: Stretching the Legs: Your Wandering Reflection.

**PLEASE REGISTER FOR ONE OF THREE LIBRARY SESSIONS ON THE INTRODUCTION TO HISTORICAL RESEARCH! THIS IS MANDATORY! THE WORKSHOPS ARE 2/3, 2/5, OR 2/13. I’LL POST THE LINKS FOR REGISTRATION TO LEARN@UW.**

**Week 3, 2/5:** Ecology, Travel, and Cultural Politics in the Nineteenth-Century US, Part I.

Reading: Aaron Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, Prologue, Part I, Part II.

**Week 4, 2/12:** Ecology, Travel, and Cultural Politics, Part II.

Reading: Sachs, *The Humboldt Current*, Part III to end.

Writing: The Pitch.

**Week 5, 2/19:** Exploration, Race, Madness, and the Ocean.

Reading: Edgar Allan Poe, *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*.

**Week 6, 2/26: LIBRARY VISIT. PLEASE MEET IN MEMORIAL 231!**

Reading: Christopher Lasch, *Plain Style*.

**Week 7, 3/5: Time, Space, and Technology.**

Reading: Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*.

Writing: The Proposal.

**Week 8, 3/12: Tourism, the Automobile, and Wilderness.**

Reading: Paul Sutter, *Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*, chaps. 1, 3-6.

Please use class time for research!

**Week 9, 3/26: “My Feeling that Everything was Dead”: On the Road in the 1950s.**

Reading: Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*.

**Week 10, 4/2: When Everything is, in Fact, Dead: The Post-Apocalyptic Journey.**

Reading: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*.

**Week 11, 4/9: Out From Slavery.**

Reading: William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.

Writing Workshop.

**Week 12, 4/16: Walt Whitman: Travel and Narrative Form.**

Reading: “Song of the Open Road,” and “Pioneers! O Pioneers!”

Writing Workshop.

Writing: Rough Draft.

**Week 13, 4/23: On the Trail with Mary Hallock Foote.**

Reading: Mary Hallock Foote, “In Exile,” *A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West*.

Writing Workshop.

**Week 14, 4/30: The Way to Rainy Mountain.**

Reading: N. Scott Momaday, *The Road to Rainy Mountain*.

Writing Workshop.

**Week 15, 5/7: Walking with Edward Abbey; or, What to Read on Your Next Staycation.**

Reading: Edward Abbey, “Walking,” “Freedom and Wilderness, Wilderness and Freedom,”  
CNN article on the “staycation.”

Writing Workshop.

**FINAL PAPER DUE MAY 14 AT NOON, IN MY OFFICE**