

History 622: American Borderlands and the West
Online Graduate Seminar
Western Kentucky University

Spring 2019 Syllabus

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Course Description

This course will offer a critical introduction to the history and historiography of the North American West. From popular culture, it is easy to get the impression of this region as a Wild West that was filled with saloons, bandits, and brothels. Although such stories offer kernels of truth, academic historians over the past several decades have painted a much more complicated picture of the North American West as a “borderlands” region that encompassed multiple intersecting spaces of collision—cultural, social, economic, and political. We will examine the history of this region long before U.S. colonial expansion to learn about the array of empires, cultures, and communities that shaped the West. As the semester progresses, we will turn to the recent past to explore how the North American West shaped, and was shaped by, the modern world. This course will develop the tools for integrating borderlands historiography into your field exams, research, and teaching.

Required Texts

Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940*, Second Edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).

John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* (1945). Penguin Centennial Edition, 2002.

All other readings will be scanned and posted to Blackboard.

Learning Outcomes

1. As a graduate reading course, our primary goal will be to end the semester with a solid grasp of the major scholars, trends, debates, and movements in the historiography of the U.S. West and Borderlands.
2. Develop and practice graduate-level analytical and writing skills in online discussions and other writing assignments.
3. Build capacities to teach American borderlands history at the high school and college levels.
4. Critically examine the relationship of regional and national histories.
5. Draw connections to historiographical debates that you have learned about, or are currently learning about, in other graduate history classes.

Assignments

This course includes three primary components: participation, short essays, and a final essay. All aspects of the course are built on a foundation of reading. Please complete each week's assigned reading by the time our discussion board is posted on Wednesday.

Participation (35%)

Weekly discussion of reading—worth of a total of 280 points (28% of grade). Each week, you must write at least one 400-450 word original post (due by Wednesday at 11:59pm) and three shorter comments on your classmates' posts (due by Friday at 11:59pm). Our weekly schedule is divided into three parts. Monday and Tuesday are set aside for reading. Wednesday is when you submit your post. Thursday and Friday are when you comment on your classmates' posts. At least two of your three comments must be posted on Thursday or Friday (after everyone has written their initial posts). Each thread is worth 20 points. Since this is a graduate course, I expect graduate-level work in discussion that demonstrates careful, critical, and constructive engagement with the readings as well as the posts of your classmates. Please see the "Online Policies" section below for additional guidelines.

Engagement with peers—worth a total of 70 points (7%). At the end of the semester, I will go back through all fourteen discussion forums and assess the overall quality of your engagement with other students' ideas. Although your comments will be considered as part of your weekly grade, these points are reserved for stepping back at the end of the semester and assessing overall quality.

Mini-Essays (40%)

Historiographical starting point essay—worth 100 points (10% of grade). Please write a 600-650 word essay examining how *The Comanche Empire* is in conversation with each of the three readings from week one. Does it challenge any of the readings? Does it support any of their arguments? You are not required to do additional research for this assignment beyond the weekly readings. **Due 2/8**

Census analysis essay—worth 100 points (10% of grade). Please select one page from the 1880 United States Census of anywhere west of the Mississippi River. The census can be accessed with a free Ancestry.com account: <https://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=6742>. Download the page. Then, write a 500-550 word analysis of this slice of population. **Due 3/22**

Literary borderlands essay—worth 100 points (10% of grade). For this essay, please select either *Island* or *Cannery Row*. Then, write a 600-650 word essay examining the ways in which the setting of either text might be considered a "borderlands" space. How can literature—either John Steinbeck's novel or the poems of Angel Island—help us understand historical dynamics? Please support your argument with specific examples from your chosen text. **Due 4/12**

Teaching essay—worth 100 points (10% of grade). Write a 500-525 word reflective essay on how this semester's work might influence your approach to teaching a United States History class in the future. What assumptions are disrupted by paying attention to the West? Any students who do not plan to pursue careers in teaching can work with me to develop an alternative version of this assignment. **Due 5/3**

Final Essay (25%)

Historiographical essay—worth 250 points (25% of grade). Write a 2800-3000 word essay using at least seven readings and exploring how the concept of "borderlands" has changed the way historians think about the North American West. What conversations do you see emerging among the scholars we have encountered? What other kinds of "borderlands" spaces have you noticed in our readings aside from the national borders between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada? **Due 5/8**

Online Policies

Even though this is an online graduate course, students should not expect that it will be less demanding than a traditional face-to-face graduate course, or that you will be able to complete the coursework in your spare time and at your own pace. Keeping up with the material is essential to doing well in this course, and will involve a considerable amount of reading and regular, active participation on the discussion forums during the course of each week. Online courses generally require more self-discipline than face-to-face courses, since you will need to take responsibility for structuring your time effectively and meeting all deadlines in the absence of physical meetings.

With that in mind, students should expect to spend roughly 10 hours per week on this course, and more if you are a slow reader or writer. Be sure that you are prepared for a graduate-level workload before beginning this course; if you fall behind, it is very difficult to catch up. If you do run into problems during the semester, be sure to talk to me as soon as possible. Your workload for a typical week in this course will include several articles or book chapters totaling roughly 100-160 pages. During the week, you will also contribute posts to the discussion forum on Blackboard and respond to other students' posts; it is best to think of these as short writing assignments, since they will require substantial time and effort. This course includes longer writing assignments as well.

The technology requirements for this online class are modest, but you must make sure you are able to meet them at the start of the semester. You will need access to a computer with a reliable internet connection in order to use Blackboard and to write and submit your assignments. You should also have a plan for an alternate way to connect to the internet (e.g. a public library or coffee shop with wireless access) in case of emergency; computer problems are not a valid excuse for late work, so plan ahead and be sure to make backups of your work. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, visit the Online Orientation for Online Learners at <http://www.wku.edu/online/orientation/index.php> before the course begins. If you have any problems using any of the online tools for this course (like the discussion forums), please contact me as soon as possible.

Late Assignments Policy

Late assignments are strongly discouraged and will result in a grade penalty. Extensions are granted only in exceptional circumstances. Please contact me if you are facing a serious issue that will impede your ability to complete course assignments on time.

Academic Dishonesty

Acts of plagiarism or any other form of cheating will not be tolerated. Please read the relevant section of the WKU Student Handbook www.wku.edu/handbook/academic-dishonesty.php.

ADA Notice

Students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, 1074. The phone number is 270.745.5004 [270.745.5121 V/TDD] or email at sarc@wku.edu.

Our Schedule

Our weekly schedule is divided into three parts. Monday and Tuesday are set aside for reading. Wednesday is when you submit your post to the discussion forum. Thursday and Friday are when you read and comment on your classmates' posts.

Week 1 (Jan. 21-25): Introduction to the U.S. West and Borderlands

This week will offer some broad framing questions for our course. We will think about the concept of the "frontier" and why it has lost purchase among historians as a way of understanding the West.

- Michael Witgen, "The Long Invisibility of the Native New World," in *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2011), 1-21.
- Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893).
- Brian DeLay, "Independent Indians and the U.S.-Mexico War," *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007): 35-68.

Week 2 (Jan. 28-Feb.1): The Comanche Empire, Part One

This week's reading is devoted to the *The Comanche Empire* (2008), which challenges several preconceptions of the North American West, most importantly the notion of Indians as passive victims who were incapable of building empires of their own.

- Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 1-64 and 141-180.

Week 3 (Feb. 4-8): The Comanche Empire, Part Two

We will discuss Comanche power in the nineteenth century and its eventual decline. How did the Comanche Empire interact with the nations and empires that surrounded it? How is this text in conversation with the readings from week one?

- Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 181-238, 292-320, and 342-361.

Note: Historiographical mini-essay due on February 8th at 11:59pm.

Week 4 (Feb. 11-15): Family in the Spanish, British, and U.S. Empires of North America

By drawing attention to the dense, transnational networks of family and trade that shaped the diverse manifestations of empire in the North American West, this week's readings offer alternatives to narratives of the "wild west" as a male-dominated place of brothels and saloons.

- Louise Pubols, "Fathers of the Pueblo: Patriarchy and Power in Mexican California, 1800-1880," in Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 67-93.
- Gwenn A. Miller, "'The Perfect Mistress of Russian Economy': Sighting the Intimate on a Colonial Alaskan Terrain, 1784-1821," in Ann Stoler, ed., *Haunted By Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 297-322.
- Susan Lee Johnson, "Domestic Life in the Diggings," in *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 99-139.

Week 5 (Feb. 18-22): Rethinking the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands

This week will introduce historiographical debates over the concept of “borderlands” as zones of conflict or cooperation. We will also examine primary sources in preparation for your Census Analysis essay.

- Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 2 (September 2011): 338-361.
- Miguel Ángel González-Quiroga, “Conflict and Cooperation in the Making of Texas-Mexico Border Society, 1840-1880,” in Benjamin Johnson and Andrew Graybill, eds., *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories* (Durham: Duke UP, 2010), 33-58.
- Katherine Benton-Cohen, “Race and Conflict in Tombstone,” in *Borderline Americans: Racial Division and Labor War in the Arizona Borderlands* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 48-79.
- Sanborn Fire Map (1886) and US Federal Census (1880), Tombstone, Arizona Territory.

Week 6 (Feb. 25-Mar. 1): The Mormon West

In the late nineteenth century, the federal government and LDS Church were the two dominant powers of the Great Basin. The practice of plural marriage was a central element of anti-Mormon propaganda until it was formally ended in 1890. Our reading this week, *A House Full of Females*, challenges the assumption that plural marriage was a system of oppression.

- Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835-1870* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2017), xi-xxv, 184-238, 264-287, and 312-387.

Week 7 (Mar. 3-8): Spring Break

- No readings or discussion.

Week 8 (Mar. 11-15): Capitalism and Fraud

The transcontinental railroad was heralded by many as a symbol of Manifest Destiny. But the history of the railroads was filled with examples of fraud, corporate welfare, and failure. How does Richard White challenge the notion of the transcontinental railroad as a triumph of American free enterprise?

- Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012), pp. xxi-xxxix (“Introduction”) and 1-87, 93-133, 455-466, and 486-493.

Week 9 (Mar. 18-22): The Politics of Land and Space

This week we will examine the spatial, political, and economic logic that sustained the transcontinentals. How did the railroads shape the social and cultural projects of the Gilded Age? Why did populism have such widespread appeal in the U.S. West?

- Richard White, “Westward the Course of Reform,” in *The Republic For Which It Stands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 589-617.
- Tamara Venit Shelton, “The Land Question,” in *A Squatter’s Republic: Land and the Politics of Monopoly in California, 1850-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 1-9.
- Lissa Wadewitz, “The Pirates of the Salish Sea,” *The Nature of Borders: Salmon, Boundaries, and Bandits on the Salish Sea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 122-143.
- Browse: Racial Dot Map of 2010 US Federal Census, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

Note: Census Analysis mini-essay due on March 22nd at 11:59pm.

Week 10 (Mar. 25-29): Maritime Borderlands and the Indigenous Pacific World

In recent years, some scholars have adopted the term “Indigenous Studies” in place of “Native American Studies” as a way to decenter continental histories in favor of a more expansive approach that includes islands and oceans as important borderlands spaces. This week we examine how indigenous studies can help illuminate the North American maritime borderlands.

- Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” in Vijay Naidu, et al., eds., *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (University of the South Pacific, 1993), 2-16.
- David Chang, “Looking Out from Hawai’i’s Shore” and “Paddling Out To See,” in *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 1-77.
- Joshua Reid, “I Want the Sea,” in *The Sea Is My Country: The Maritime World of the Makahs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 124-163.
- Alice Te Punga Somerville, “The Great Pacific Garbage Patch as Metaphor: The (American) Pacific You Can’t See,” in Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, eds., *Archipelagic American Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 320-335.

Week 11 (April 1-5): Cannery Row

John Steinbeck’s fictional novel, *Cannery Row* (1945), examines the social life of Monterey, which was the center of California’s sardine canning industry. The novel served as the inspiration for the revitalization of Monterey as a tourist destination after the collapse of the canneries due to overfishing.

- John Steinbeck, *Cannery Row* (1945). Penguin Centennial Edition, 2002.

Week 12 (April 8-12): Angel Island

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first major law restricting immigration. Support for the bill came largely from California and the Western territories. In 1910, the Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay was established to screen immigrants. Our reading this week examines the poetry etched in the walls of the holding cells by Chinese detainees.

- Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, eds., *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940*, Second Edition (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), viii-xii, 2-163, 197-220.

Note: Literary borderlands mini-essay due on April 12th at 11:59pm.

Week 13 (April 15-19): San Francisco

In the 1960s to 1980s, the San Francisco Bay Area became a focal point of radical left activism, including the Red Power, antiwar, and gay liberation movements. It also became increasingly segregated by race. This week’s readings examine the public and private spaces of San Francisco in this period.

- Richard Rothstein, “If San Francisco, Then Everywhere?” in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017), 3-14.
- Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Warrior, “Leap of Faith” and “We Won’t Move,” in *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 1-35.
- Cary Cordova, “Hombres y Mujeres Muralistas on a Mission,” in *The Heart of the Mission: Latino Art and Politics in San Francisco* (2017), 126-151.
- Cleve Jones, “A Vision of the Quilt,” in Charles Morris, ed., *Remembering the AIDS Quilt* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), xi-xxxiv.

Week 14 (April 22-26): Ronald Reagan and the New Right

Perhaps the most common explanation for the resurgence of conservatism in the mid-twentieth century is Richard Nixon's "southern strategy," which appealed to white southern Democrats unhappy with the gains of the Civil Rights movement. But the leading conservative figures of this period—Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Barry Goldwater—were westerners. Their original base of support was in the suburbs of Southern California and the Sunbelt. Why did the U.S. West play such a major role in launching the "new conservatism" of the 1960s-1980s?

- Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-53 and 187-216.
- Mario Savio, "Thirty Years Later: Reflections on the Free Speech Movement," in Robert Cohen and Reginald Zelnick, eds., *The Free Speech Movement* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002), 57-72.

Week 15 (April 29-May 3): Digital Crossroads

We will close the semester by examining Silicon Valley and the role of California in the development of the internet, which has scrambled concepts of time, space, borders, trade, and community. How has the economic and cultural ethos of northern California shaped the country and world?

- Stephen Cohen and Gary Fields, "Social Capital and Capital Gains in Silicon Valley," *California Management Review* 41, no. 2 (1999): 108-130.
- Natasha Tiku, "An Alternative History of Silicon Valley Disruption," *Wired*, October 22, 2018.
- Annie Gowen and Max Bearak, "Fake News on Facebook Fans the Flames of Hate against the Rohingya in Burma," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2017.
- Jenny Odell, "A Business With No End: Where Does this Strange Empire Start or Stop?" *The New York Times*, November 27, 2018.

Note: Teaching mini-essay due on Friday, May 3rd, at 11:59pm.

Note: Final historiographical essay due on Wednesday, May 8th, at 11:59pm.