The American West

Professor Elliott West

Summer 2022

Course Description

The American West has played an enduring role in the popular culture of the nation and the world. The images are familiar: cowboys and cattle drives, Indian wars, wagon trains, rowdy mining towns, and homesteaders. All in fact were part of the story, but behind the color and drama of films, novels, and art were developments critical to the creation of the modern American nation and its rise as a global economic, political, and military power. The West was as well a showplace of the industrial, social, technological, and scientific forces remaking the world beyond America. This course will trace the expansion of the United States to the Pacific, the exploration of the West, the defeat and dispossession and profound tragedy of its Native peoples, and environmental transformations matched at few if any other places on earth. Within all of this were compelling human stories that are part of our collective national identity.

Course Readings


Course Requirements

- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Complete five short papers (1–2 pages)
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page paper or project of appropriate rigor

Learning Objectives
1. Students will trace American expansion into the land that would become the Western United States.
2. Students will focus on the demographic, social, economic, technological, and political changes that accompanied American expansion into the West.

Class Schedule

Week 1: June 2: The West: Its Land and Peoples

Readings

- Walter Prescott Webb, “The American West: Perpetual Mirage,” Harper’s Magazine, May 1, 1957. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week One module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board One

Week 2: June 9: Other Empires: Spain, England, Comanches, Lakotas

Readings

- West, “The West before Lewis and Clark: Three Lives,” Ch. 6

Assignments

- Discussion Board Two
- Short Paper One due June 15
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Q&A Session One: Wednesday, June 15 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET
Week 3: June 16: Lewis and Clark and Those Other Guys: First U.S. Explorations

Readings

- Butler et al., “From the Northwest Passage to the Great Reconnaissance,” pp. 130–141.
- West, “Lewis and Park,” Ch. 1

Assignments

- Discussion Board Three
- Final Paper/Project Question due June 22
  - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final paper or project will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the paper or project you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic, a brief description of your research plan, and a justification for why your particular paper or project is worth pursuing.

Week 4: June 23: The Great Gulping: Expansion, 1845–1848

Readings

- Horsman, all

Assignments

- Discussion Board Four
- Short Paper Two due June 29
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week 5: June 30: The Great Coincidence: The California Gold Rush

Readings

- Milner et al., pp. 195–208
Susan Lee Johnson, "Bulls, Bears, and Dancing Boys: Race, Gender, and Leisure in the California Gold Rush," *Radical History Review* 60 (1994): 4–37. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Five module.)

Johnny Faragher and Christine Stansell, "Women and Their Families on the Overland Trail to Oregon and California, 1842-1868," *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2/3 (1975): 150–66. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Five module.)

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Five
- Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due July 6
  1. Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor’s feedback AND
  2. Create an annotated bibliography containing at least five sources. Each of these sources should be followed by a short paragraph describing the source and what it will contribute to your final paper/project.

**Q&A Session Two: Wednesday, July 6 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET**

**Week 6: July 7: The Civil War: A Continental Struggle**

**Readings**

- Elliott West, *Continental Reckoning: The American West in the Age of Expansion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), Chapter 5. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.)
- Jennifer Nez Denetdale, “Discontinuities, Memories, and Cultural Survival,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 82, no 3 (2007): 295–316. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.)
- Katherine M. B. Osburn, “The Navajo at Bosque Redondo: Cooperation, Resistance, and Initiative, 1864–1868,” *New Mexico Historical Review* 60, no. 4 (1985): 399–413. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Six module.)

**Assignments**

- Discussion Board Six
- Short Paper Three due July 13
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

**Week 7: July 14: Here Come the Feds: Washington in the West**

**Readings**
• Maps (A link to these images can be found in the Week Seven module.)
  ○ “Progress Map of the US Geographical Surveys, 1882”
  ○ “Clarence King Surveys”
  ○ “1803–1806 National Geodetic Survey”
  ○ “Expeditions of Zebulon Montgomery Pike”
  ○ “Lt. Zebulon Pike, 1806”
  ○ “Major Stephen Long, 1819–1820”
  ○ “John C. Fremont expeditions”
• Milner et al., pp. 173–183
• John Wesley Powell, *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons* (1895), pp. 210–223 and 246–287. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Seven module.)
• West, “Reconstructing Race,” Ch. 5

Assignments

• Discussion Board Seven
• Short Paper Four due July 20
  • Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

  **Q&A Session Three: Tuesday, July 19 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET**

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**Week 8: July 21: Telegraphs, Railroads, National Parks**

Readings

• Milner et al., pp. 213–224
• West, “Wired to the World,” Ch. 4
• Butler et al., “Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Northwest Railroad Workforce, 1893–1912,” pp. 318–327.

Assignments

• Paper/Project Preview due July 27
  • Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.
  • Project: Submissions of the project preview will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.

  **Q&A Session Four: Wednesday, July 27 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET**
**Week 9: July 28: The Human Fabric: Western Society**

**Readings**
- Maps of continental US (A link to these images can be found in the Week Nine module.)
  - “Distribution of Foreign Born Population 1870”
  - “Distribution of Male Population 1870”
- “Women Migrants” (1886), in Carol Berkin and Mary Beth Norton, *Women of America* (Boston, 1979), 243–244, accessed on Digital History. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Nine module.)

**Assignments**
- Discussion Board Eight
- Short Paper Five due August 3
  - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

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**Week 10: August 4: Industrial West I: Farms and Ranches**

**Readings**
- “Driving Cattle from Texas to Iowa, 1886,” *Annals of Iowa* 14, no. 4 (1924): 243–262. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.)

**Assignments**
- Rough Draft due August 10
  - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
  - Project: Submissions of the project rough draft will differ from project to project according to type. Determine an appropriate portion of your final project to turn in with your section professor.
Week 11: August 11: Industrial West II: Mining

Readings

- West, "Golden Dreams: Colorado, California, and the Reimagining of America," Ch. 2.
- Catharine R. Franklin, "Black Hills and Bloodshed: The U.S. Army and the Invasion of Lakota Land, 1868–1876," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 63, no. 2 (2013): 26–41 and 90–93. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Eleven module.)
- Eliot Lord, *Comstock Mining and Miners* (1883), pp. 301–321 and 355–405. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Eleven module.)

Assignments

- Discussion Board Nine

Q&A Session Five: Wednesday, August 17 - 8:00-9:30 p.m. ET

Week 12: August 18: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Readings

- No readings

Assignments

- Final Paper/Project due August 24