

The American West

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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 a showplace of the industrial, social, technological, and scientific forces transforming the world beyond America. The course will examine 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. Students will leave the course knowing more about the compelling human stories that shaped our collective national identity.

Led by Elliott West, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History, University of Arkansas

Lecture Videos

This course consists of approximately 12 hours of instruction presented by Professor Elliott West, split into 24 lecture videos ranging from 15 minutes to 30 minutes in duration. Below are the lecture titles and major themes as identified by Professor West. The videos provide the content needed to answer the quiz questions.

1. “The West: Its Land and Peoples” (2 videos)
2. “Other Empires: Spain, England, Comanches, Lakotas” (2 videos)
3. “Lewis and Clark and Those Other Guys: First US Explorations” (2 videos)

4. “The Great Gulping: Expansion, 1845-1848” (2 videos)
5. “The Great Coincidence: The California Gold Rush” (2 videos)
6. “The Civil War: A Continental Struggle” (2 videos)
7. “Here Come the Feds: Washington in the West” (2 videos)
8. “Binding the West: Telegraph, Railroads, National Parks” (2 videos)
9. “The Human Fabric: Western Society” (2 videos)
10. “The Industrial West I: Farms and Ranches” (2 videos)
11. “The Industrial West II: Mining” (2 videos)
12. “Looking Back, Looking Ahead” (2 videos)

Note: Course lectures were originally recorded for the Gilder Lehrman Institute’s online graduate program. You can disregard references to assignments, other coursework, and the use of content in classrooms discussed in the videos. They are not part of the History U program.

Resources

Select the Resources link for information about the primary and secondary resources, videos, and websites referred to in the course. Please note: History U participants are not required to read or purchase print materials. All quiz questions are drawn from the lectures.

Quizzes

The purpose of the six short quizzes is to review your knowledge of the material covered in the lectures. No outside reading is required to answer the questions successfully. After watching the lectures, select and complete the corresponding quizzes to test your knowledge and qualify for the Certificate of Completion.

Certificate of Completion

After you finish watching all of the lectures, score an 80% or higher on each quiz, and complete the feedback survey, you will be able to download your certificate.

Please email historyschool@gilderlehrman.org with any questions.