

The American West

Professor Elliott West

Summer 2024

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

1. Butler, Anne M., David Rich Lewis, and Clyde A. Milner II, eds. *Major Problems in the History of the American West*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997.
2. Horsman, Reginald. *Race and Manifest Destiny: Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
3. Milner II, Clyde A., Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss, eds. *The Oxford History of the American West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
4. West, Elliott. *The Essential West: Collected Essays*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014.

Course Requirements

- Watch all course lectures
- Complete all course readings
- Submit five short papers (500 words each)
- Contribute to nine discussion boards
- Participate in at least three Q&As
- Complete a 15-page research paper or project of appropriate rigor
- Complete a course evaluation (a survey link will be sent to your Gettysburg email during Week Eleven of the semester)

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 One: May 30: The West: Its Land and Peoples

Readings

- Milner et al., "Native Peoples and Native Histories," pp. 13–43.
- Butler et al., "Wolf Calf Describes the Arrival of Horses" and "Francis Chardon Laments the Destruction," pp. 86–93.
- 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

- Week One Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, June 2
 - Second post due: Wednesday, June 5
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Week Two: June 6: Other Empires: Spain, England, Comanches, Lakotas

Readings

- Milner et al., "The Spanish-American Rim," pp. 45–77.
- West, "The West Before Lewis and Clark: Three Lives," Ch. 6
- Butler et al., "The Count of Parades' Report" and "The Testimony of Pedro Naranjo," pp. 47–50.
- Pekka Hämäläinen, "The Politics of Grass: European Expansion, Ecological Change, and Indigenous Power in Southwest Borderlands," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2010): 173–208. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Two module.)

Assignments

- Week Two Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, June 9
 - Second post due: Wednesday, June 12

- Short Paper One due: Wednesday, June 12
 - 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 Three: June 13: Lewis and Clark and Those Other Guys: First US Explorations

Readings

- Butler et al., "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy on the Southern Plains," pp. 103–114.
- Butler et al., "Meriweather Lewis at the Great Falls of the Missouri" and "The Stephen Long Expedition's Report," pp. 117–122.
- Butler et al., "From the Northwest Passage to the Great Reconnaissance," pp. 130–141.
- West, "Lewis and Park," Ch. 1.

Assignments

- Week Three Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, June 16
 - Second post due: Wednesday, June 19
 - Final Paper/Project Question due: Wednesday, June 19
 - In roughly 1–2 pages, outline the question your final project or paper will attempt to answer. This should include a description of the project or paper 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 project or paper is worth pursuing.
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Week Four: June 20: The Great Gulping: Expansion, 1845–1848

Readings

- Butler et al., "The Myths of Manifest Destiny," pp. 169–182.
- Horsman, all.

Assignments

- Week Four Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, June 23
 - Second post due: Wednesday, June 26
- Short Paper Two due: Wednesday, June 26

- 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 Five: June 27: 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. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- 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): 150–166. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))

Assignments

- Week Five Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, June 30
 - Second post due: Wednesday, July 3
 - Revised Question and Proposed Bibliography due: Wednesday, July 3
 - Revise your initial proposal to incorporate your section professor's feedback AND
 - 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 project/paper.
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Week Six: July 4: 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): Ch. 9. (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

- Week Six Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, July 7
 - Second post due: Wednesday, July 10
 - Short Paper Three due: Wednesday, July 10
 - 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 Seven: July 11: 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

- Week Seven Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, July 14
 - Second post due: Wednesday, July 17
 - Short Paper Four due: Wednesday, July 17
 - 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 Eight: July 18: Telegraphs, Railroads, National Parks

Readings

- Milner et al., pp. 213–224.

- West, "Wired to the World," Ch. 4.
- Butler et al., "William A. Bell Describes the Engineering of the Railroad," pp. 306–308.
- Butler et al., "Race, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Northwest Railroad Workforce, 1893–1912," pp. 318–327.

Assignments

- Project/Paper Preview due: Wednesday, July 24
 - 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.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first five pages of your final paper.

Week Nine: July 25: The Human Fabric: Western Society

Readings

- Butler et al., "Children and the Frontier," pp. 247–254.
- Butler et al., "Bordeaux v. Bordeaux: A Story of Divorce," pp. 255–267.
- Butler et al., "Gender, Protest, and the Anti-Chinese Movement," pp. 294–302.
- Milner et al., "A Saga of Families," pp. 315–358.
- Maps of the 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"
- "Woman 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

- Week Nine Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, July 28
 - Second post due: Wednesday, July 31
- Short Paper Five due: Wednesday, July 31
 - Write a response paper: You can respond to the prompt created by your section professor or to one of your own design.

Week Ten: August 1: Industrial West I: Farms and Ranches

Readings

- Milner et al., "Animals and Enterprise," pp. 237–274.
- Milner et al., "An Agricultural Empire," pp. 275–314.
- Butler et al., "The Cattle Towns Adjust to Violence," pp. 206–221.
- "Driving Cattle from Texas to Iowa, 1886," *Annals of Iowa* XIV, no. 4 (1924): 243–262. (A link to this reading can be found in the Week Ten module.)

Assignments

- Rough Draft due: Wednesday, August 7
 - 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.
 - Paper: Turn in a rough draft of the first ten pages (at minimum) of your final paper.
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Week Eleven: August 8: Industrial West II: Mining

Readings

- Butler et al., "Farming and the Northern Ute Experience," pp. 359–369.
- 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. ([This reading can be accessed through Musselman Library with your Gettysburg College credentials.](#))
- 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

- Week Eleven Discussion Board
 - First post due: Sunday, August 11
 - Second post due: Wednesday, August 14
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Week Twelve: August 15: Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Readings

- No readings

Assignments

- Final Project/Paper due: Wednesday, August 21

Course and Program Policies

It is the responsibility of students to know, understand, and abide by course and program policies.

For a full overview of program policies, review the Gettysburg College–Gilder Lehrman Institute Student Handbook.

Course correspondence

Correspondence with faculty and administrators should be formal. Include a subject line, addressee, and closing. Put the name and number of your course in the subject line.

Plagiarism and AI

This program uses Turnitin to check for instances of plagiarism and AI. Plagiarism and papers composed fully or in part by AI will not be tolerated. This includes self-plagiarism. A student caught plagiarizing or composing papers with AI for the first time may receive a zero on the assignment. A student caught plagiarizing or composing with AI for a second time may be permanently removed from the program.

Your section professor will set the policies for use of AI for research or purposes other than composing your papers.

Late work

Assignments should be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time on the due date unless otherwise specified by your section professor. If you think you will be unable to submit an assignment on time, it is your responsibility to contact your section professor to ask for an extension before the assignment's due date. Late assignments will be docked 5% if less than a week late, 10% if one week late, and an additional 10% for each subsequent week.

Grading scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade	Grade Points
A	95%–100%	4
A-	90%–94%	3.67
B+	87%–89%	3.33
B	84%–86%	3
B-	80%–83%	2.67

C+	77%–79%	2.33
C	74%–76%	2
C-	70%–73%	1.67
D+	67%–69%	1.33
D	64%–66%	1
D-	60%–63%	.67
F	0%–59%	0

Assignment Descriptions

Short Papers (25% of grade – 5% per short paper)

Students will complete five short papers. Each should be approximately 500 words long. The purpose of these papers is not to merely summarize weekly readings but to demonstrate that you have read them analytically and contextually. Students have the option of responding to a prompt created by their section professor or to one of their own design. Prompts should reflect the themes discussed in course readings. If you need help getting started, you can complete one of the options listed below.

Complete a thesis identification - Select one of your assigned readings and focus on identifying the thesis as well as the evidence the authors use to support that thesis.

Complete a primary source evaluation - Evaluate a primary source from the Gilder Lehrman Collection or elsewhere. Primary sources must be relevant to that week's readings. Keep the following questions in mind:

- Who is the author of this document?
- Who was their intended audience?
- How might both author and audience impact the content of the document?
- For what reason was this document created?

Complete a book review - Focus on one of the secondary sources assigned in this course and critique it. Keep the following questions in mind:

- What is the author's argument?
- Does the author adequately support their argument?
- Are you convinced of their argument? If not, why not?
- How does this source fit into the larger discussion of its topic?

Discussion Board Posts (18% of grade – 2% per discussion board)

Students will interact in nine discussion boards in this course. Discussion boards are led by section professors, who will provide specific instructions for participation in their section. You are required to make at least one post to each discussion board and respond to **at least two other students**.

Question-and-Answer Sessions (15% of grade – 5% per reaction)

Throughout the semester the lead professor of each course will conduct five Q&As. Students **MUST** attend at least three of these sessions for each course they are taking. **In order to receive credit for attending each Q&A, you must complete a 1–2-paragraph Q&A Reaction within 24 hours of participation.** Note: If you cannot attend three of the five Q&As, you may receive credit by viewing archived Q&As and completing a 500-word review of topics covered for each missed Q&A. **Makeup assignments must be completed within two weeks of the missed Q&A.**

Final Project/Paper (42% of grade)

For the final assignment of each course, you will choose to complete either a research project or 15-page research paper. Research projects are a public-education tool designed for the general population, teachers, and/or students of varying ages. Sample projects include (but are not limited to) vodcasts and podcasts, document editing and transcription, websites, annotated readers, walking tours, or museum exhibits. Lesson plans *will not* be accepted. A 5-page narrative must accompany the project. Your section professor must approve research projects.

The research paper can be a traditional position paper that uses original research to prove a thesis statement or a historiography paper that critically examines how American historians have interpreted the same event differently and why shifts in historical debates may have occurred.

Both final assignment options require you to ask an open-ended historical question (something that does not have an easy yes or no answer) that you do not yet know the answer to. You will then use the research process (pulling from a variety of resources, mostly primary source documents) to explore that question and create a thesis-driven answer. Regardless of whether you choose to pursue a project or paper, finals are scaffolded throughout the semester. This method breaks up a large grade into smaller constituent grades and allows time to incorporate instructor feedback into assignments.

Scaffolded Assignments

- Final Project/Paper Proposal (2%)

In roughly 1–2 pages, you should outline the main question, topic, or purpose of your final project or paper. This should include a description of the project or paper you are proposing, some background information and historical context on your topic

(answer the questions who, what, where, and when), a brief description of your research plan (this does not need to be super specific, but should outline how many weeks you plan to research, if you need to schedule research trips or if your sources are published or available digitally, and when you plan to begin writing) and a justification for why your particular project or paper is worth pursuing (what is the significance of this topic? What does it add to our historical knowledge? Are you filling a gap that other historians have overlooked such as considering race, ethnicity, or gender?)

- Revised Proposal and Annotated Bibliography (3.5%)

This assignment will give you the opportunity to incorporate the feedback you received on the first draft of your proposal. In addition to incorporating your section professor's comments, you will also submit a proposed bibliography listing five sources you plan on utilizing in your research for your final product. Each of these sources should be followed by a brief summary (3–5 sentences) of the source and what it will contribute to your research process.

- Project or Paper Preview (5%)

This will give you the opportunity to show the progress you have made on your final project or paper and get some early-stage feedback from your section professor. For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be roughly the first five pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Rough Draft (10.5%):

For a final project, determine with your section professor an appropriate portion of your final submission to turn in. For a final paper, this should be, at minimum, the first ten pages of what will ultimately be your final submission.

- Final Product (21%):

Final Project: Much like the final paper option, a final project is meant to prove that you have mastered the content covered by this course. We encourage you to be creative in your approach to this project, though it should be equivalent in rigor and workload to a final paper.

Final Paper: Final papers should be at least fifteen pages in length. These can take the form of research papers or historiography papers.