Early History of the North American West

HSTAA 312

Instructor: Josh Reid

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Overview
The American West conjures forth a range of iconic and mythical images for many people both in and beyond this nation. In popular imagination, independent-minded white pioneers settled the West and made it part of the United States. But this region that is now part of our nation has a much longer and more diverse story. It has a narrative peopled by many distinct Indigenous peoples, Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Asians and Asian Americans, African Americans, and immigrants from European countries. The powerful federal government and monolithic corporations fueled by urban capital dominated the region in complex ways. However, the challenges faced by the various peoples who have called this region their home at one time or another still make this the quintessential American story. This course will cover the early history of the North American West, beginning with the ways Indigenous peoples transformed this region into homelands and concluding with the nineteenth-century contestations over the lands, resources, and meanings of the West.

In this course, students will understand:
- The diversity of peoples who have called the North American West their home.
- How frontier myths arose in the popular culture of this nation and what these myths tell us about US history.
- How diverse peoples remade the environments of the North American West as they transformed it into their home.
- How settlement of the North American West reshaped the politics and economy of this nation.
- How the North American West has been connected to other national and transnational regions.

Expectations & Responsibilities
You, the student, can expect the following from me, the instructor:
- Create and foster a safe and stimulating learning environment in which students can take intellectual risks.
- Facilitate historical inquiry.
- Clarify expectations and help students prepare for course assessments.
- Effectively assess student work in a fair and timely manner – I will provide suggestions for improvement and affirm work that is done well.

I, the instructor, can expect the following from you, the student:
- Share ideas and listen to others.
• Respect the learning environment.
• Punctually attend all class sections – if you are late, please enter quietly.
• Come prepared to learn and participate: if a discussion activity is scheduled for a specific session, complete the reading assignments before coming to class.
• Alert me to any concerns you may have and seek help when needed.

Course Readings
You may purchase required books at the university bookstore or any number of local and online retailers. Please feel free to purchase used copies of these texts. There are a number of additional required readings that I will post on our course Canvas site. These are marked with an (OL) on the syllabus.

The required books (in order) are:

Class Sessions
Although this course is structured around lectures, I have set aside time for several discussions because there are no assigned discussion sections. These will help you construct sophisticated arguments useful for historical inquiry. Writing assignments require you to incorporate material from lectures and readings; the class discussions will help you connect the readings to the lectures. This is why I expect you to attend every class and to come having finished the required readings on the days during which I have scheduled a discussion activity. Repeated absences and/or failing to stay caught up on the assigned readings will strongly hamper your ability to excel in this class.

Note about the pandemic: Currently, the university is strongly recommending that we continue to wear masks while indoors, at least for the first two weeks. While delivering the lectures, I will be unmasked both to allow me to breathe more easily while talking for long periods of time and to make it easier for students to understand me while I’m talking. Therefore, I request that students sitting in the front two rows of tables keep their masks on. This will minimize not just my exposure (and the exposure of those in the front rows from me) but also the possibility of me needing to move the course online if I get sick and need to quarantine. If you are sick or feeling any symptoms of COVID, stay home, take care of yourself, and get tested—notify the appropriate authorities so that I or the class can take any further precautions, as needed.

Canvas
Although this is not an online course, having reliable and regular access to a computer and the Internet will be necessary. All assignments will be submitted through Canvas. Papers will need to be uploaded to Canvas, which will allow me to leave detailed comments helping you to improve your writing and analytical skills. If this is going to be a problem for you, please bring this to my attention immediately so we can figure out how to support you. A number of readings
(marked “OL”) will be posted to this site. Handouts, PDFs of PowerPoint slides, instructions, and other helpful material will be distributed through Canvas; if, for some reason, you are unable to open or access these, please notify me immediately so I can send them to you in another format.

**Assignments & Evaluation**

Each student earns his or her own grade. My job as the instructor is to assess your work along clearly articulated guidelines and expectations. I also value and reward improvement. Therefore, it is critical that you do all the assignments, attend all the class sessions, and engage with the course concepts. It is impossible for me to evaluate what you have not turned in or articulated! Please note that late work will be penalized 5% per day (with a maximum loss of 30%), including weekends and holidays.

Your final grade will be determined by:

- **Short Writing Exercise** (due 10 PM, Jan. 17) 100 pts.
- **Paper: Part 1** (due 10 PM, Jan. 26) 150 pts.
- **Paper: Part 2** (due 10 PM, Mar. 5) 250 pts.
- **Evaluation of Secondary Literature** (due 10 PM, Mar. 15) 250 pts.
- **Discussion Reflections** (online, throughout the quarter) 100 pts.
- **Participation** (throughout the quarter) 150 pts.

**In order to be eligible to earn a passing grade for this course, you must complete all items marked with an asterisk.**

* **Short Writing Exercise**
I have scheduled one 500-word writing exercise early in the quarter. This is designed to practice the analytical writing skills that you will also use in the more formal paper. Moreover, this will alert me to any writing challenges you may have and provide you with some examples of what I am looking for when assessing student writing.

* **Paper**
You will be required to write a progressive essay in this course. Think of it as two parts to a paper that you will develop over the quarter, hence why two paper parts contribute toward the final grade. In the first paper assessment (due Thursday, Jan. 26), you will write 750-900 words in which you will formulate an original argument; structure a formal, academic paper with an introduction, body, and conclusion; and support assertions using substantial and specific evidence. This essay needs to argue a specific point of view that encourages the reader to agree or disagree. I am a challenging but fair evaluator, and I provide substantial feedback, which you will then incorporate into your second paper assessment. Working with my feedback, you will expand the paper, building on the argument you established in the first paper assessment by drawing on additional sources and concepts. By the end of the quarter, your finished paper will be from 2,000 to 2,500 words in length (due Sunday, Mar. 5). A higher percentage of the final grade is assigned to the second paper assessment in order to reward significant improvement in your writing.
I will provide a more detailed set of instructions for each paper assessment well before the due date. These instructions will include the prompt, guidelines for writing an effective essay, proofreading checklist, formatting requirements, and any other relevant information. I strongly encourage you to visit me during office hours to discuss paper topics in advance. Please remember that late work will be penalized 5% per day (with a maximum loss of 30%), including weekends and holidays.

**Evaluation of Secondary Literature**

In lieu of exams, students will read a piece of scholarly secondary literature and write a paper evaluating how this book complicates, confounds, or supports our understanding of the early North American West. We will discuss books in small reading groups during the final class session. Finished papers will be 1,500 (+250) words in length. I will provide a more detailed set of instructions—including a list of possible books to read—later during the quarter.

**Online Discussion Reflections**

I will assess several of our in-class discussion activities through online discussion reflections, accessible through Canvas. For these exercises, you will write a short reflective piece (250-300 words) about the discussion. You can write about one or two compelling discussion points that emerged, questions you still have about the reading or about a topic raised in the discussion, or a different perspective that struck you after thinking back on the discussion. You might also connect the discussion to other concepts and readings relative to the course. This is meant to be an open-ended exercise encouraging you to think critically about the discussion activity and demonstrate that you learned something from it. Of course, it will be impossible for you to do well on specific reflections if you do not attend class that day, participate, and take notes. Please note that all reflections are due online by noon the day after the discussion activity.

**Participation**

Throughout the quarter, I will assess your participation. Students who do well on this grading category attend class regularly, complete the assigned readings in a timely fashion (i.e., before the discussion activities), and participate thoughtfully in the discussion activities.

**Grading Scale**

| 4.0 | 980-1,000 pts. | 2.8 | 830-839 pts. | 1.6 | 710-719 pts. |
| 3.9 | 960-979 pts. | 2.7 | 820-829 pts. | 1.5 | 700-709 pts. |
| 3.8 | 950-959 pts. | 2.6 | 810-819 pts. | 1.4 | 690-699 pts. |
| 3.7 | 930-949 pts. | 2.5 | 800-809 pts. | 1.3 | 680-689 pts. |
| 3.6 | 910-929 pts. | 2.4 | 790-799 pts. | 1.2 | 670-679 pts. |
| 3.5 | 900-909 pts. | 2.3 | 780-789 pts. | 1.1 | 660-669 pts. |
| 3.4 | 890-899 pts. | 2.2 | 770-779 pts. | 1.0 | 650-659 pts. |
| 3.3 | 880-889 pts. | 2.1 | 760-769 pts. | 0.9 | 640-649 pts. |
| 3.2 | 870-879 pts. | 2.0 | 750-759 pts. | 0.8 | 630-639 pts. |
| 3.1 | 860-869 pts. | 1.9 | 740-749 pts. | 0.7 | 600-629 pts. |
| 3.0 | 850-859 pts. | 1.8 | 730-739 pts. | 0.0 | 0-599 pts. |
| 2.9 | 840-849 pts. | 1.7 | 720-729 pts. |
Emergencies
In the event of illness, a death in your family, or other catastrophic, personal crisis—especially as this pandemic continues—I will be sympathetic and flexible, provided that you alert me as soon as possible and preferably in advance of an assignment’s due date. Belated excuses will not account for poorly done or late work. Considering our current situation, I will be even more flexible than usual; however, I ask that you always strive to keep open the lines of communication so that I can best support you.

Communication
Emailing me or making an appointment to meet with me in person or online is the best way to communicate. Feel free to contact me via email to set up a session.

At the beginning of each week, I send out a class announcement via Canvas. This reminds everyone what they should be working on, including readings and assignments. Additionally, I will notify you if there are any changes to the schedule. Please be sure to set up your Canvas preferences so that you receive course announcements through your email.

Schedule
Below is the schedule for the quarter. I expect you to have completed all readings before class begins on the days scheduled for discussion activities.

- Jan. 3: Introductions
- Jan. 5: No class – [away at a conference]

Unit 1: Early Indigenous West
- Jan. 10: Making the Red Continent

Discussion Reflection 1 due noon, Jan. 11
- Jan. 12: Thinking Historically – Rise of the Triple Alliance

Unit 2: Imperial Spain in the North American West
- Jan. 17: Beginnings of European Expansion

Short Writing Exercise due online 10 PM, Jan. 17

Discussion Reflection 2 due noon, Jan. 20
- Jan. 24: Spanish Expansion into the American Southwest
- Jan. 26: No class

Paper (Part 1) due 10 PM, Jan. 26
- Jan. 31: Indigenous Limits on Spanish Expansion

**Unit 3: The Ambiguous West**
- Feb. 2: Frontiers & Furs – Discussion on Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (OL)

  **Discussion Reflection 3 due noon, Feb. 3**
- Feb. 7: Daniel Boone – The Ambiguous American (Part 1)
- Feb. 9: Daniel Boone – The Ambiguous American (Part 2) – Discussion: Saunt, *West of the Revolution* (just Intro through Ch. 6, & Epilogue [pp. 11-168, 209-11])

  **Discussion Reflection 4 due noon, Feb. 10**

**Unit 4: The US West**
- Feb. 14: American Expansion into the West – Discussion: Lewis & Clark Journal excerpts (OL)

  **Discussion Reflection 5 due noon, Feb. 15**
- Feb. 16: Trade & Expansion in the Pacific West
- Feb. 21: Overland Migrations – Discussion: Burlend, *True Picture of Emigration*

  **Discussion Reflection 6 due noon, Feb. 22**
- Feb. 23: U.S. Empire in the West – Discussion: US-Mexico War Documents (OL)

  **Discussion Reflection 7 due noon, Feb. 24**
- Feb. 28: No class – [away giving a talk]

  **Paper (Part 2) due 10 PM, Mar. 5**
- Mar. 7: Problems of Western Expansion
- Mar. 9: Wrap-up – Book Group Discussions

  **Evaluation of Secondary Literature due by 10 PM, Mar. 15**

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO EMEND THESE POLICIES AND SCHEDULE AT MY DISCRETION AND WILL GIVE ADEQUATE NOTICE OF ANY CHANGES.