

## **History/Geography 965 Seminar in the History of the American West**

The seminar introduces students to major themes of frontier and western history by exploring some of the field's most interesting recent scholarship. It is not a systematic chronological survey, and those students desiring such a survey may wish to sit in on my western history lecture course at some time. The seminar is reading-intensive--often with well over 300 pages of reading per week--so keeping up with assignments and participating in class discussions is an essential requirement. You should think of the reading you'll do for this course as being akin to the volume and kind of work you'd be likely to do for a prelim field in western history, which means that you should regard this syllabus as an opportunity to develop your ability to move fairly rapidly through a large volume of material, extracting major themes and arguments and controversies without getting bogged down in details. We will not be able to discuss in class everything we read, but it's all important background for your understanding of the field, and I hope you'll read it accordingly.

Although we'll touch on many subjects that have been important to western historians, the seminar has another ongoing agenda that will structure much of our activity. Western history has long been among the most popular fields for teaching history to undergraduates; unlike many other kinds of history, the West evokes very lively interest college classrooms, making it an ideal subject for introducing students to a wide range of historical subjects. We will spend a lot of time in class talking about effective strategies for teaching western history, and we will try to make our discussions broadly applicable to all aspects of undergraduate education pertaining to the past. I have designed this syllabus to include a large and diverse array of readings--more than may be typical in many graduate seminars--that are suggestive not just for their research and their analytical approaches, but for their rhetoric, their literary presentations, and their pedagogical possibilities. I have completely redesigned writing assignments so that each addresses some aspect of the undergraduate classroom: syllabus design, exams, written assignments, class discussions, field trips, and so on. I expect seminar members to put in a lot of time reading, thinking about writing and teaching, and talking about key issues in this field; to compensate for the heavy reading load, I've eliminated all research components from the course.

### **Handouts:**

Syllabus - [pdf](#) [html](#)

Fall 2004

## History 965

### SEMINAR IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

**INSTRUCTOR:** Bill Cronon, 426 Science Hall, 265-6023, office hours 9:00-11:30 Wednesdays or by appointment. Email is usually the best way to reach me: [wcronon@facstaff.wisc.edu](mailto:wcronon@facstaff.wisc.edu). (I have an office in 5103 Humanities as well, but can more often be found at 426 Science Hall.)

#### **A NOTE ON THE COURSE:**

The seminar introduces students to major themes of frontier and western history by exploring some of the field's most interesting recent scholarship. It is not a systematic chronological survey, and those students desiring such a survey may wish to sit in on my western history lecture course at some time. The seminar is reading-intensive--often with well over 300 pages of reading per week--so keeping up with assignments and participating in class discussions is an essential requirement. You should think of the reading you'll do for this course as being akin to the volume and kind of work you'd be likely to do for a prelim field in western history, which means that you should regard this syllabus as an opportunity to develop your ability to move fairly rapidly through a large volume of material, extracting major themes and arguments and controversies without getting bogged down in details. We will not be able to discuss in class everything we read, but it's all important background for your understanding of the field, and I hope you'll read it accordingly.

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I have ordered the following books from the University Bookstore:

Cronon, Nature's Metropolis

Davis, City of Quartz

Faragher, Sugar Creek

Hoxie, Parading Through History

Ise, Sod & Stubble

Patricia Limerick, Legacy of Conquest

Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge: Remapping the American West

Milner, et al., Oxford History of the American West

Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American

Stegner, Angle of Repose

Weber, Spanish Frontier in North America

Please note that you do not need to purchase all of these volumes. You will not be reading all of them in their entirety, and copies will also be available on reserve in the library. You should feel free to share books with your classmates. Many of our readings will be xeroxed excerpts from articles, manuscripts, and books, and you will find a copy of these on a shelf in the southwest corner of the State Historical Society Library's reading room. Xeroxed readings are marked with an (X) in the syllabus below. Feel free to xerox the Historical Society articles for yourself, but do not remove them from the room for longer than it takes to make a copy. (My preference if possible is for you actually to read them in the Historical Society's main reading room, since this will give you a chance to discuss what you're studying with other members of the seminar who will also be working there. If this isn't possible, that's OK too, but the more interaction you can have with other seminar members outside of class, the better.) If you discover that a reading is missing, please let me know immediately so I can provide another copy.

### **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:**

Scattered throughout the weekly outline below you will find a number of written assignments, most of them relatively brief, asking you to use that week's readings to explore a particular pedagogical technique, strategy, or challenge involved in teaching western history to a group of undergraduates. You will be asked to design a first written assignment, a mid-term exam, a lesson plan, a class field trip, and an actual undergraduate lecture on a subject of your choice. More details are included in the weekly outline, and we'll discuss these assignments at length in class as well.

In addition, the seminar will collectively author a "Handbook of Good Teaching Practice." At a meeting on September 22 which I will attend only at the beginning, you'll decide on the chapters that ought to go into such a handbook, assign individual chapters to teams of 2-3 students, and set a weekly timeline for when individual teams will report on their findings. Teams will brainstorm and gather ideas about the particular aspect of undergraduate teaching they're examining, then deliver a report on teaching strategies relevant to a particular week's readings, accompanied by a handout of "tips" that will constitute their "chapter" of the Handbook. At the end of the semester, we should collectively have generated a very helpful collection of ideas for effective undergraduate pedagogy. We'll discuss how to proceed with this project at our first meeting and at the pancake breakfast we'll share together on Saturday, September 18.

I've become increasingly conscious in my graduate teaching of the importance of helping students develop a number of professional skills as they move toward their dissertations and their eventual careers as researchers, writers, public intellectuals, and--not least--classroom teachers. Since this course will have little to say about the research process except as a by-product of our discussion of works by other scholars, I hope we can concentrate on other key academic skills. In addition to the critical reading, writing, and teaching skills I've already mentioned, I'll be emphasizing the importance of learning to talk like a professional historian. Although students vary widely in how comfortable they feel about speaking in class, it's in fact crucial to your future career that you figure out ways to become

comfortable talking about your work: this, after all, is what you're likely to be doing in the classroom, at conferences, with colleagues, and in many public venues for the rest of your life. It's also what you'll need to do when you take orals, defend your dissertation, and--not least!--go on the job market. I'm therefore expecting everyone to talk in class. At the same time, however, I'm also expecting everyone to listen in class. Too many academics are far more interested in hearing their own voices than they are in hearing the views of colleagues and students; too many graduate seminars (and academic conferences) are little more than theaters of oneupmanship, with no spirit of genuine collaboration. My hope is that we can collectively resist these unfortunate impulses by working together as a critical community to discuss texts and ideas in rigorously critical ways that are also constructive, collegial, even nurturing. In much the same way, we'll spend some time on pedagogy and teacherly questions as well.

Finally, all members of the seminar will serve at least once as "discussion starters," with a pair of students being expected to frame the beginning of each class meeting with five to ten minutes of provocative opening questions and comments about the week's themes and readings. Discussion starters will do so in conjunction with the particular chapter of the "Teaching Handbook" they've chosen to write, so that a group that has decided to offer, for instance, comments on how to lead an effective class discussion might choose to illustrate their general remarks on teaching by referring to that week's readings.

## WEEKLY OUTLINE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### **September 8: Introductory**

Discussion of course structure and requirements, introductions to members of the seminar. No Readings.

### **September 15: The Problems of Western History**

Readings:

- Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) (X)
- Earl Pomeroy, "Toward a Reorientation of Western History: Continuity and Environment," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 41 (1955), 579-600. (X)
- Howard Lamar, "Persistent Frontier: The West in the Twentieth Century," Western Historical Quarterly, 4 (1973), 5-25. (X)
- Patricia Limerick, Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987), 17-175, 322-49.
- Richard White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own", (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 3-4. (X)
- William Cronon, George Miles, Jay Gitlin, Editors' Introduction, in Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 3-27.
- Wallace Stegner, "Introduction," Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs (New York: Random House, 1992), xv-xxiii. (X)
- Matsumoto & Allmendinger, "Introduction," Over the Edge, 1-12.
- Alan Brinkley, "The Western Historians: Don't Fence Them In," New York Times Book Review September 20, 1992. (X)
- Burton Folsom, Martin Ridge, Gerald Thompson, Gerald Nash, William Goetzmann, "Symposium on the New Western History," Continuity: A Journal of History, Fall 1993. (X)
- Optional: OHAW, Nugent, "Comparing Wests and Frontiers," 803-33.

Written Work: Design a brief first written assignment (to be completed by students in 2-3 pages) for an undergraduate survey course in western history. Draft a sample response to the assignment, and then write a brief evaluation of your own essay.

### **September 18: Saturday Morning Class Breakfast**

Reflections on what teachers do, and what they have given us: members of the seminar will be asked to share a memory of one of their most important teachers and why that person had such an important impact.

### **September 22: Designing a Handbook for Good Teaching Practice**

I will be leaving for a conference in the middle of our seminar, but I'd like you to continue meeting without me and construct the table of contents for a guide to good teaching practice that we will collectively author over the course of the semester. Seminar members should come prepared to discuss and decide the appropriate chapters that belong in such a guide, and also assign themselves into the groups that will be responsible for producing individual chapters. You will need also to define a timeline for when each of these chapters will be completed and offered to the class. Although the guide will emphasize western history and use examples drawn from that field, the general principles and suggestions it offers should of course be relevant to almost any undergraduate course which emphasizes the study of the past.

### **September 29: Northern Borderlands**

Readings:

- OHAW, Weber, "Spanish-Mexican Rim," 45-77, read quickly for survey of major themes.
- David Weber, The Spanish Frontier in North America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), entire. (X)
- Ramon Gutiérrez, "Crucifixion, Slavery, and Death: The Hermanos Penitentes of the Southwest," in Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge, 253-71.
- Miroslava Chavez, "Pongo mi Demanda: Challenging Patriarchy in Mexican Los Angeles, 1830-1850," in Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge, 272-90.

**October 6: Through Native Eyes**

## Readings:

- Frederick Hoxie, Parading Through History: The Making of the Crow Nation in America, 1805-1935. (New York: Cambridge, 1995), entire.
- Vine Deloria, Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 78-100. (X)
- Peggy V. Beck and Anna L. Walters, "The Wandering Ground," in The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life (Navajo Community College Press, 1977), 329-43. (X)
- Leslie Marmon Silko, Storyteller (New York: Seaver Books, 1981), 1-42. (X)
- Optional: OHAW, Iverson, "Native Peoples and Native Histories," 13-43. (recommended as overview)

Written Work: Design a lesson plan strategizing how would you discuss the above readings in an undergraduate discussion section. Discuss the thematic goals you would emphasize, sketch the narrative trajectory you might try to pursue for the conversation, offer sample questions, and discuss any special challenges or problems you think these readings might pose in an undergraduate class.

**October 13: Interpreting Life on the Land**

- John Ise, Sod and Stubble (University Press of Kansas, 1996), entire.
- Special packet re Old World Wisconsin and issues relating to public history.

**October 16: ALL-DAY FIELD TRIP TO OLD WORLD WISCONSIN****October 20: Frontier Community Formation**

## Readings:

- John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), entire.
- OHAW, Gitlin, "Empires of Trade, Hinterlands of Settlement," 79-113; West, "American Frontier," 115-49; Milner, "National Initiatives," 151-93; Conzen, "A Saga of Families," 315-57; Szasz, "Religion and Spirituality," 359-91.

Written Work: Design a field trip you might take with an undergraduate seminar or lecture course to Old World Wisconsin. How would you organize the event, how would you prepare students for it in advance, how might you structure their experience while at the site, and what would you expect from them as an interpretive exercise or project once they had returned?

**October 27: Midwestern (R)evolutions**

## Readings:

- William Cronon, Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), xiii-xvii, 1-259, 371-85.
- Antipode debate re Nature's Metropolis. (X)
- OHAW, White, "Animals and Enterprise," 237-73; Bogue, "Agricultural Empire," 275-313.
- Frank Norris, "A Deal in Wheat." (X)
- Donald Hall, Ox-Cart Man (New York: Viking, 1979), entire. (X)

Written Work: Write a midterm exam as if you were giving a lecture course based on the seminar readings thus far; include at least one objective and one essay section. (You needn't actually take the exam yourself, but do add any commentary that will help explain why you've chosen the exam questions you have.)

**November 3: Underground West**

## Readings:

- Wallace Stegner, *Angle of Repose* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1971), entire.
- Rodman Paul, *Mining Frontiers of the Far West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1963), 1-36, 56-86. (X)
- Susan Johnson, "'Domestic' Life in the Diggings: The Southern Mines in the California Gold Rush," *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 107-32.
- Richard V. Francaviglia, *Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 65-167 (skim). (X)

**November 10: Race and Western Identity**

## Readings:

- George Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican-American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), entire.
- OHAW, Deutsch, Sánchez, Okihiro, "Contemporary Peoples/Contested Places," 639-69.
- Karen Anderson, "Changing Woman: Maternalist Politics and 'Racial Rehabilitation' in the U.S. West," in *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 148-59.
- Melissa L. Meyer, "American Indian Blood Quantum Requirements: Blood is Thicker than Family," in *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 231-49.
- Flamming, Douglas, "A Westerner in Search of 'Negro-ness': Region and Race in the Writing of Arna Bontemps," in *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 85-104.
- William Deverell, "Plague in Los Angeles, 1924: Ethnicity and Typicality," in *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 172-200.
- Peggy Pascoe, "Race, Gender, and the Privileges of Property: On the Significance of Miscegenation Law in the U.S. West," in *Matsumoto & Allmendinger, Over the Edge*, 215-30.
- Elizabeth Jameson, "Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs* 13:4 (Summer 1988). (X)

**November 17: Transformations of War**

## In-Class Screening of A FAMILY GATHERING.

- OHAW, Schwantes, "Wage Earners and Wealth Makers," 431-67; Abbott, "Federal Presence," 469-99.
- Gerald Nash, *The American West Transformed* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 3-74, 201-16. (X)
- Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California, 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3-22, 131-69, 346-55. (X)

**November 24: The Great Thirst**

## Readings:

- Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York: Ginn, 1931), 3-9. (X)
- Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 3-97. (X)
- William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History, and Narrative," *Journal of American History*, 78:4 (March, 1992), 1347-1376. (X)
- Norris Hundley, Jr., *The Great Thirst: Californians and Water, 1770s-1990s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 119-200, 201-98. (X)
- Joan Didion, "Holy Water," in *The White Album* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 59-66. (X)
- William deBuys and Alex Harris, *River of Traps: A Village Life*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 11-25. (X)
- OHAW, Cronon, "Landscapes of Abundance and Scarcity," 603-37.

Written Work: Rough drafts of lectures due by class meeting this week.

**December 1: Landscapes of the Mind**

## Readings:

- Theodore Roosevelt, "Frontier Types," Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail (1888), 81-100. (X)
- Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), 5-12, 53-70, 250-60. (X)
- Robert Warshaw, "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner," (1954) in Warshaw, The Immediate Experience, (New York: Atheneum, 1962, 1975), 135-54. (X)
- Richard Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 1-26, 29-87, 303-12. (X)
- Jane Tompkins, West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 47-87. (X)
- Anne E. Goldman, "'I Think Our Romance Is Spoiled,' or, Crossing Genres: California History in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* and María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*," in Matsumoto and Allmendinger, Over the Edge, 65-84.
- Robert Athearn, The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 249-75. (X)
- OHAW, Dippie, "The Visual West," 675-705; Lyon, "The Literary West," 708-41; Peterson, "Speaking for the Past, 743-69; Butler, "Selling the Popular Myth," 771-801.
- Wallace Stegner, Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier (New York: Viking, 1962), 3-30.

Written Work: Comments on other students' lectures due by class meeting this week.

**December 8: Continent's End on the Cusp of a New Millennium**

## Readings:

- Mike Davis, *City of Quartz* (London: Verso, 1990), entire (read quickly).
- OHAW, Malone and Peterson, "Politics and Protests," 501-33.
- William Kittredge, *Owning It All* (St. Paul: Graywolf Press, 1987), 55-71. (X)
- Frank J. Popper, "The Strange Case of the Contemporary American Frontier," *Yale Review*, 76 (Autumn 1986), 101-21. (X)
- Michael McGerr, "Is There a Twentieth-Century West?," *Under an Open Sky*, 239-56.

**December 15: Forget the Alamo**

In-Class Screening of John Sayle's *LONE STAR*, with discussion to follow.

Written Work: Final drafts of lectures due by class meeting this week.

**December 18: End-of-Year Class Breakfast: Closing Reflections on Teaching**