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Sierra Nevada Mountains, looking west from Citrus, California, c. 1911 (LOC)

**Seminar in Teaching American History**  
**Western Expansion and Life on The American Frontier**  
Spring 2006 - Mount Wachusett Community College

**Course Description & Goals:**

This course, like all courses in the Teaching American History program, has a dual objective. As a graduate history course, it will examine the broad causes, character, and consequences of Euro-Americans' expansion into the trans-Mississippi West. Through course readings, and discussions, you will not only secure a basic knowledge of many of the major themes that shaped Western history, but you will also examine and debate some of the central questions that historians have attempted to answer about the West and its storied past. Of equal importance, as a history education course, it will help you to develop specific strategies for teaching middle- and high-school students about the West as well as about the process of historical inquiry: analyzing primary sources, reflecting on one's analysis, and effectively expressing one's ideas on paper. It will also address the use of information technology in teaching Western history. In working toward these goals, our focus will be on the documents that form the backbone of all historical study and knowledge.

**Course Texts:**

- Retrieving the American Past: Westward Expansion and Life on the Frontier* (Boston: Pearson Publishing, 2005).
- Holliday, J.S., *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002; 1981).
- Hurtado, Albert L. and Peter Iverson, eds., *Major Problems in American Indian History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).
- Limerick, Patricia Nelson, *Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1987).
- Milner, Clyde, et al, eds., *Major Problems in the History of the American West*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).
- Schaefer, Jack, *Shane* (New York: Laurel Leaf, 2003; 1949).
- Schlissel, Lillian, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004; 1982).
- Utley, Robert, *High Noon in Lincoln: Violence on the Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

White, Richard, "Western History" (American Historical Association, 1997).

White, Richard, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996).

### **Course Requirements**

Reading assignments, projects, and in-class audiovisual material and Internet explorations serve as the basis of for whole-class and small-group discussions in this seminar-style course. Hence, your timely completion of coursework, regular attendance, and active participation are not only required but important to the success of the class and to your success as a learner.

### **Major Assignments:**

1. Those seeking graduate credit must prepare two week-long units of instruction, based on course content, each consisting of three lesson plans that equal a week's instruction. For those seeking Professional Development Points (PDPs), the requirement is one such set of lesson plans. Unit lesson plans must utilize:

- Massachusetts Department of Education Curriculum Frameworks
  - topics and primary documents covered in the course
  - appropriate and effective use of technology to enhance learning
  - related research and fieldwork
- At least two of the unit lesson plans must directly connect some aspect of the course with local history. These two lesson plans must involve class visits to, or at least material derived from, historical societies and museums in your area.
  - All students are expected to contribute a unit lesson plans or special presentation to the TAH website and should come to the final class meeting prepared to present this material to the class. An electronic format of the lesson plan needs to be emailed to [tah@fsc.edu](mailto:tah@fsc.edu) for placement on the website.

2. All students must choose two (2) of the following activities for graduate credit or one for PDPs:

- Develop an annotated list of six (6) websites linked to one or more of your lesson plans that other teachers could use as resources for teaching.
- Read and review one (1) book-length scholarly work on Western history. Your review should summarize the author(s) approach, main arguments, and evidence and discuss how you would make use of the work in your teaching.
- Present an analysis of three (3) relevant primary source documents as part of a student-centered activity. Your analysis should reflect a detailed examination of the documents, place them in historical context, and discuss how you would use them to enhance student learning about the time period/problem they address.
- Visit and review four (4) electronic historical sites on the Internet. Your review should provide a brief description of the websites and their relevance to Western history, what you learned from your "virtual tour," and how you would use the websites in your teaching.
- Visit and review two (2) actual historic sites. Your review should provide a brief description of the sites and their relevance to Western history, what you learned from your visit, and how you would use the sites in your teaching.

**Writing Guidelines:** All written work must include a header that identifies your name, the date, and the assignment. Always keep a second copy of your work in case the one you turned in gets lost or damaged. In the case of such a misfortune, you will be responsible for submitting another copy of your work.

**Academic Honesty:** You are responsible for academic honesty. If you are found to be guilty of cheating or plagiarism, you may earn an F on the assignment and possibly an F in the course.

**Special Needs:** If you have a documented disability that may require accommodation in this course, or have emergency medical information you need to share with me, please speak with me as soon as possible, or who need special arrangement in case the building must be evacuated should discuss this with me before the second class meeting.

### **Evaluation Criteria**

Those working for PDPs will be expected to attend and participate at all classes, and complete all requirements and assignments. For those seeking graduate credit for this course, the following criteria will be used for grading purposes. To receive a 4.0, a student must perform at the highest level on all assignments, demonstrating historical imagination and insight, creativity, a deep understanding of the subject matter, and excellent research and writing skills. To receive a 3.5, a student must perform at a high level on all assignments. To receive a 3.0, a student must perform at an acceptable level on all assignments. A grade below 3.0 is considered probationary for graduate work at Fitchburg State College.

Final course grades will be based on the following calculation:

Lesson plans (#1), including the lesson plan designed for the website	60%
Two projects of your choosing as detailed above (#2)	30%
Attendance and participation	10%

## Reading and Assignment Schedule

### Introduction

Western history tends to be neglected in our classrooms, primarily because the subject gets short shrift in the Massachusetts Frameworks and because the West is a part of the country both distant from us and too often seen as marginal to the main currents of U.S. history. We therefore begin the course by examining the ongoing debate over the significance of the West. Key questions will include how Americans today should conceptualize the West (i.e., as a moving “frontier” or a geographic place), and from what perspective(s) the story of the West is most fruitfully told.

### **1. Tuesday, Jan. 24: Conceptualizing the West**

- Richard White, “Western History” (AHA pamphlet)
- Milner, ch. 1: “Defining the West and Its History”
  - Turner, “Significance of the Frontier in American History” & “Problem of the West”
  - Webb, “The Great Plains”
  - Limerick, “The Legacy of Conquest” and “What on Earth is the New Western History?”
  - Cronon, “Revising the Vanishing Frontier: The Legacy of Turner”
  - Worster, “New West, True West: Interpreting the Region’s History”
- Limerick, Introduction and ch. 1

### Western Experiences

We next explore various facets of the Western experience, beginning with the first U.S. efforts to explore and settle the trans-Mississippi West in the early- and mid-nineteenth century. Specific topics include the West as an ethnic and cultural frontier; the process of conquering and attempting to assimilate the Plains Indians; the experiences of travelers, particularly women, on the Overland Trail; the California Gold Rush and the broader mining frontier; the controversial issue of Western violence, in particular on the cattle frontier; and violence and other central themes in American popular culture.

### **2. Tuesday, Jan 31: The U.S. Looks West**

- *Retrieving the American Past (RTAP)*, “Lewis & Clark”
- Milner, ch. 4 & ch. 5
  - ch. 4: “Federal Support of Explorers and Emigrants”
    - Meriwether Lewis at the Great Falls of the Missouri, 1805
    - The Overland Trails: Three Tables of Statistics
    - William H. Goetzmann, “From the Northwest Passage to the ‘Great Reconnaissance’”
  - ch. 5: “The Legacy of Acquisition”
    - Mexican General Mariano Arista's Advice to the Soldiers of the U.S. Army, 1846
    - Anastasio Parrode, Commander-in-Chief of the Dept of Tamaulipas, to His Troops, 1846
    - Charles DeMorse Gives a Texan's View of the War with Mexico, 1846
    - John C. Calhoun on Incorporating Mexico, 1848

John A. Dix on Expansion and Mexican Lands, 1848  
 Thomas R. Hietala, “The Myths of Manifest Destiny”

- Hurtado, ch. 8: “The Trans-Mississippi West Before 1860”
  - Joseph Flores Describes the Comanche Destruction of the San Saba Mission in TX, 1758
  - A Spanish Official Gives an Analysis of Comanche Power, 1758
  - Chief Sharitarish Foretells the End of the Pawnee Way of Life, 1822
  - Hämäläinen, “The Comanche Trade Center: Rethinking the Plains Indian Trade System”

*Recommended\*:*

RTAP, “The Texas Revolution”

### **3. Tuesday, Feb. 7: Getting There: The Overland Trail**

Schlissel, Introduction, “Families in Transit I, 1841-1850,” & all of the diaries

*Recommended:*

Limerick, ch. 4: “Uncertain Enterprises”

RTAP, “Men and Women”

Milner, ch. 10, docs. 354-359 & Fite essay

FEBRUARY 14 AND 21: PROJECT PREPARATION – NO CLASS MEETINGS

### **4. Tuesday, Feb. 28: The Gold Rush and the Mining Frontier**

Limerick, ch. 4

Holliday, Preface, Prologue, ch. 1 & chs. 10 - 13

*Recommended:*

Holliday, chs. 4, 7, 8 & 9

Hurtado, ch. 8, docs. 4-6 & Hurtado essay

### **5. Tuesday, March 7: Western Violence**

Utley, *High Noon in Lincoln: Violence on the Western Frontier* (entire book)

*Recommended:*

Milner, ch. 6

### **6. SATURDAY, March 18: The Mythology of Western Violence**

Schaefer, *Shane* (entire book)

### **7. Tuesday, March 21: Resistance and Accommodation on the Plains**

- Limerick, ch. 6

- Hurtado, ch. 9 – 11

ch. 9. “Indian Perspectives on the Civil War”

Wabasha Explains How Nefarious Trading Practices Caused 1862 MN War, 1868

Gary Clayton Anderson, “Dakota Sioux Uprising, 1862”

ch. 10. “Resistance and Transition, 1865-1886”

Allen P. Slickpoo (Nez Perce) Reviews the Nez Perce War (1877), Recorded 1973  
 James Harris Guy (Chickasaw), "The White Man Wants the Indians' Home," 1878  
 Luther Standing Bear (Lakota) Recalls His the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, 1879  
 Ace Daklugie, Charlie Smith, Jasper Kanseah Remember Geronimo  
 David D. Smits, “Indian Scouts and Indian Allies in the Frontier Army”

ch. 11. “Restrictions and Renewals, 1887-1928”

The General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) of 1887

• Milner, ch. 10. “Living on the Land, Leaving the Land”

Northern Ute Allotment, 1903

John-Stands-in-Timber & Ella Deloria Recall Reservation Farming, 1877-1900

Martin Charlot and the Futility of Flathead-Salish Farming, 1890-1920

Jorgen and Otto Jorgensen Remember the Decision to Homestead in Montana, 1906

David Rich Lewis, “Farming and the Northern Ute Experience”

*Recommended:*

Hurtado, ch. 11, Child essay

†**Thursday, March 23: Film screening @ FSC—*The Unforgiven***

**8. Tuesday, March 28: New Perspectives on the Old West**

Limerick, chs. 2, 3, 7 & 8

Milner, ch. 8. “Contested Reforms”

Testimony of Anti-Chinese Witnesses, 1876

Augustus Layres Endorses Chinese Immigrants, 1877

A Poetic Expression of the Chinese Perspective, c. 1885

Margaret K. Holden, “Gender, Protest, and the Anti-Chinese Movement”

†**Thursday, March 30: Film screening @ FSC—*The Uprising of '34***

†**Thursday, April 13: Film screening @ FSC—*A Midwife's Tale***

**Tuesday, April 11: TAH Symposium @ MWCC—James E. Loewen [attendance required]**

TUESDAY, APRIL 4 AND 11: PROJECT PREPARATION – NO CLASS MEETING

† Attendance of film screenings is optional. Those interested must register with the FSC Professional Development Center. Attendance of the TAH symposium is required.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude with our following several of these topics, as well as issues dealing with human interaction with the environment, into the twentieth century. In doing so, we focus on Patricia Limerick's and other recent historians' argument for the West's "unbroken past."

### **9. Tuesday, April 25: The West in the Twentieth Century, Part 1**

- Limerick, chs. 5 & 10

- Milner, ch. 11. "Dam Water, Damn Dust"

- Caroline A. Henderson's Letter from the Dust Bowl, 1935

- Donald Worster, "The Black Blizzards Roll In"

- Hurtado, ch. 12 & 14

- ch. 12. "Efforts at Reform, 1928-1941"

- Lewis Meriam Summarizes the Problems Facing American Indians, 1928

- The Indian Reorganization Act (Wheeler-Howard Act), 1934

- Rupert Costo (Cahuilla) Condemns the Indian New Deal, 1986

- Ben Reifel (Brule Lakota) Praises the Legacy of John Collier, 1986

- D'Arcy McNickle (Salish-Kutenai), "The Indian New Deal as Mirror of the Future"

- ch. 14. "Taking Control of Lives and Lands, 1961-1980"

- Clyde Warrior (Ponca) Delineates Five Types of Indians, 1965

- A Proclamation by the Indians of All Tribes, Alcatraz Island, 1969

- Troy R. Johnson, "The Roots of Contemporary Native American Activism"

#### *Recommended:*

Hurtado, ch. 14, Hauptman and Campisi essay

Milner, ch. 14, docs. 490-500 & Cawley essay

### **10. Tuesday, May 2: The West in the Twentieth Century, Part 2**

White, *Organic Machine* (entire book)

#### *Recommended:*

Milner, ch. 15

### **11. Tuesday, May 9: Best Practices Sharing**

**Snow Date:** April 4

\*Note: "Recommended" readings are not required, and we will not discuss them in class. They are readings that I think would be useful and interesting but that I could not fit into our limited schedule. Either when completing your lesson plans or simply at some point in the future, they are worth going back to read.