

HISTORY 3310

HISTORY OF

WESTERN AMERICA



SUL ROSS STATE UNIVERSITY

General Introduction

This course explores the histories and cultures of the American West. Our course will follow two parallel and often intertwined tracks. We will examine the creation, development and influence of the North American West, paying special attention to development of the western continental United States since 1848. We will also explore the evolution of the West as an idea in American intellectual and popular thought from the inception of the United States through the present. You will emerge from this class with the ability to engage in both conversations and think about the West in new ways.

BASIC INFORMATION

Instructor: Dr. John Truden

Email: john.truden@sulross.edu

Office: Lawrence Hall 211

Class: Asynchronous (Online Anytime)

Office Hours: Mondays, 1-3 & Tuesdays, 9-12

Land Acknowledgements

Sul Ross State University is on the ancestral lands of the Jumanos, Lipan Apaches, Comanches, Kiowas, Plains Apaches, Mescalero Apaches and Chisos Apaches.

Sul Ross State University International is on the ancestral lands of the Jumanos, Coahuiltecans, Lipan Apaches, and the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas

Learning Objectives

At the end of this class, students should be able to:

- Identify various cultures and communities in the North American West
- Chart the evolution of the West in American intellectual and popular thought
- Outline the history of the American West since the Mexican War

Student Learning Objectives (History)

Student Learning Outcomes

The history student will demonstrate historical research skills in a logically-organized, written paper that is mechanically correct and supported by relevant documentation of historical content. Marketable Skills:

- Students will learn the importance of meeting deadlines in a successful manner.

- Students can identify the differences between primary and secondary sources, a crucial step in developing critical thinking skills.
- Students can learn to select and organize data in a relevant manner.
- Students can hone their writing skills.

The history student will demonstrate the ability to write about topics in historiography and how those topics are interpreted. Marketable Skills:

- Students can learn how ideas and interpretations change over time.
- Students can learn how to evaluate different interpretations and ideas.
- Students can learn how to use evidence to persuade various audiences.

The history student will demonstrate knowledge of American History, World History, and Non-American History. Marketable Skills:

- Students can develop a better understanding of the development of various cultures, political and economic systems, gender and race relations, and environmental change.
- Students can develop a multicultural perspective necessary for an increasing globalized world.
- Students can learn how to manage and absorb various perspectives and information.

Readings

- Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Harvard University Press, 1950)
- Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unresolved Past of the American West* (W.W. Norton, 1987)
- Kate Beaton, *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* (Drawn and Quarterly, 2022)
- Joel Cohen and Ethan Cohen, *No Country for Old Men* (2007)

All other readings will be provided by the instructor.

ASSIGNMENTS

Grades

Each person earns their own grade. My job as the instructor is to assess your work along clearly articulated guidelines and expectations. I also value and reward improvement. It is therefore critical that you do all assignments, attend all class sessions, and participate in all discussions. Remember, you are a contributor, a co-learner, and a fellow investor in our collective educational experience.

Discussion (35%)

This class is asynchronous, meaning we will not meet at a particular time or place. However, community is an essential part of learning. With that in mind, a substantial portion of your grade will come from engagement with your colleagues as follows. For discussion, please follow this schedule:

1. For the purposes of this course, “the week” is considered Monday through the following Sunday
2. Each Monday (the beginning of the week), I will post a lecture. You are expected to watch these lectures and take notes, both for your weekly quizzes and for our discussions.
3. Between Monday and Friday, you should watch and take notes on the lecture, read any assigned readings (I will remind you but readings are also listed on the schedule), and complete any discussion-related preparations (I will notify you of these on Monday).
4. By Friday at 11:59pm, you will post your initial response to a series of questions I or one of your colleagues will post on the discussion board. Your response should be in the form of a video recording. Your face must be visible and we should be able to see your face as you speak. The recording should be at least two minutes in length and should directly answer the discussion questions. You are free to add your own thoughts, commentary or ideas but you must first answer the questions. It should be clear from your response that you prepared for discussion by reading the materials and thinking about them.
5. You will receive two points for your response.
6. By Sunday at 11:59pm, you must post responses to at least two colleagues. These responses must be separate and should each be at least 30 seconds. Your responses must be in a video format and your face should be visible as you speak. For your response to count, you must address your colleague by name and build on their comment in a substantive way. If you simply agree or repeat what your colleague said, you will not receive credit for that portion of the discussion.
7. You will receive one point per response to your colleagues.

Discussion Questions (10%)

At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up to provide discussion questions for two of the following fifteen weeks. For each week you select, you will need to read the assigned materials in advance and devise two questions that you believe would prompt conversations about those materials. Discussion questions must be submitted to me by Thursday at 11:59pm on your assigned week.

Check In (5%)

During Week 3 and Week 15, you will meet with me one on one over Blackboard Collaborate. These meetings are intended to be a forum for you to ask questions, address concerns and simply check in on how you feel you are doing. If you are in Alpine, you are welcome to meet with me in person. These meetings can occur during my office hours.

Quizzes (30%)

Each week, you will complete a quiz on Blackboard to gauge your mastery of that portion of the course. All lectures, materials and discussions are fair game. Quizzes will be due the Sunday following the previous week. For example, the Week 1 Quiz will be due at the end of Week 2. These quizzes are intended to be low-stakes exercises and are open book. Collaboration between colleagues is not allowed. If you have any questions, email me.

Analysis Paper: The West in Film (20%)

Since the inception of film in the late nineteenth century, the medium has been intertwined with how we conceive of the American West. The Western is the oldest genre of film and one of the most prolific. You will select and analyze a Western film using what you've learned in our class as well as commentary from academic secondary sources. I will provide a list of films for you to choose from or you may select another. Either way, your selected film must be approved in advance by me. You will then write a 7–8 page analysis of your selected film, exploring how the film relates to some aspect of the American West. I will consult with you throughout the process. Your paper must be in Chicago format and must cite relevant academic secondary sources.

Category	Due Date	Point Value
Film Selection	1/25	5
Thesis	2/15	5
Outline	3/8	5
Partial Draft	4/5	15
Final Draft	4/29	20
		50

POLICIES

Contact

Please contact me via email or speak to me during my office hours. During the work week (Monday through Friday), I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours.

Conduct

All are welcome in my classroom. I expect you to treat your fellow classmates and any guests with empathy, kindness, and respect. Remember that we (myself, you and your peers) can make mistakes. In that circumstance, I ask for grace for both myself and your colleagues. I hope to extend that same grace to you.

Academic Integrity

Students who violate academic integrity will receive a zero on the associated assignment. Some examples of violations of academic integrity are plagiarism, failure to properly cite sources of information, or submitting papers written by someone else (including with the assistance of artificial intelligence). To be successful in this class, your work must be yours and yours alone.

AI Policy

Any use of artificial intelligence on an assignment must be pre-approved by the instructor and documented. A.I. can be a useful tool but it is not a replacement for critical thinking.

Reasonable Accommodation and Extenuating Circumstances

In the event of illness, a death in your family, or other catastrophic personal crisis, 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. You will need to support any medical excuses with the appropriate, written documentation. I will also work with you to accommodate long term extenuating circumstances, such as pregnancy and childbirth, limited transportation, childcare, limited access to the internet, limited access to permanent housing, or other issues. While I cannot solve these problems, I will work with you.

RESOURCES

Students with Disabilities

Sul Ross State University is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility services must contact:

Mary Schwartze
Ferguson Hall, Room 112
Mailing address: P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832
Phone: 432-837-8691
Email: mschwartze@sulross.edu

As a person with disabilities, I hope you will take advantage of these resources.

Lobo Food Pantry

The Lobo Pantry serves as a temporary, judgement free, resource for students experiencing food and financial insecurity. All currently enrolled students are eligible to use the Lobo Pantry services.

Counseling

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare. All SRSU students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting Timelycare/SRSU. The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus).

Academic Assistance

As an SRSU student, you have access to several programs designed to assist your academic performance. If you need help with writing, contact the SRSU Writing Center via Blackboard: [https://shsu.blackboard.com/ultra/organizations/ 195798 1/cl/outline](https://shsu.blackboard.com/ultra/organizations/195798_1/cl/outline) or via Robin Alvarez (Writing Center Coordinator) at rka19ro@sulross.edu. You also have access to the Lobo Den Tutoring Center at Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library. Anthony Quintana is Coordinator of Tutoring Services: anthony.quintana@sulross.edu.

Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers free resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837-8123).

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 14-18)

- Lecture: An Indigenous Place
- Readings:
 - [Native Land Digital](#)
 - [Project 562](#)
- Discussion: Defining the West

Week 2 (January 20-25)

- Lecture: Spanish Borderlands

- Readings:
 - Smith, *Virgin Land*, 3-51
 - [New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, “Segesser Hide Paintings”](#)
 - [Segesser II Hide Painting \(c. 1720-1729\)](#)
 - [Nebraska Historical Society, “A Pawnee Perspective on the Villasur Expedition” \(2020\)](#)
- Discussion: Who Defines the West?
- Week 1 Quiz due January 25
- Film Selection due January 25

January 19 – Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Week 3 (January 26-February 1)

- Lecture: The Fur Trade
- Readings: Smith, *Virgin Land*, 51-89
- Discussion: Fur Traders, Mountain Men, and Indigenous Women
- Week 2 Quiz due February 1
- Check In #1

Week 4 (February 2-8)

- Lecture: US Expansion, 1803-1848
- Reading: Smith, *Virgin Land*, 90-120
- Discussion: American Popular Conceptions of the West
- Week 3 Quiz due February 8

Week 5 (February 9-15)

- Lecture: US Consolidation, 1848-1900
- Reading: Smith, *Virgin Land*, 123-200
- Discussion: American Intellectual Conceptions of the West before 1860
- Week 4 Quiz due February 15
- Thesis due February 15

Week 6 (February 16-22)

- Lecture: The Cattle Industry
- Reading: Smith, *Virgin Land*, 201-249
- Discussion: American Conceptions of the West, 1860-1890
- Week 5 Quiz due February 22

Week 7 (February 23-March 1)

- Lecture: Suffrage
- Readings:
 - Smith, *Virgin Land*, 250-260

- Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 17-32
- Discussion: Complicating the Frontier Thesis
- Week 6 Quiz due March 1

Week 8 (March 2-8)

- Lecture: The West in Film
- Readings:
 - [Edwin S. Porter, *The Great Train Robbery* \(1903\)](#)
 - Joel Cohen and Ethan Cohen, *No Country for Old Men* (2007)
- Discussion: The Canon of the Western
- Week 7 Quiz due March 8
- Paper Outline due March 8

Week 9: Spring Break

Week 10 (March 16-22)

- Lecture: Urbanization and Industrialization, 1900-1945
- Readings:
 - Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 35-96
 - [Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, “Sagebrush Rebellion” \(2016\)](#)
- Discussion: Property Rights and the Paradox of Dependence in the West

Week 11 (March 23-29)

- Lecture: Energy Frontiers
- Readings:
 - Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 97-175
 - [Colorado Experience, “Ludlow Massacre” \(2013\)](#)
- Discussion: Change, Continuity, and Instability in the West
- Week 10 Quiz due March 29

Week 12 (March 30-April 5)

- Lecture: Exclusion
- Readings:
 - Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 259-320
 - [American Masters, Anna May Wong: The First Asian American Movie Star \(2020\)](#)
 - [Weekend Edition, “The Legacy of the Mississippi Delta Chinese” \(2017\)](#)
- Discussion: Controlling the West
- Week 11 Quiz due April 5
- Partial Draft due April 5

Week 13 (April 6-12)

- Lecture: The Cold War West, 1945-1980

- Reading:
 - Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 179-258
 - [American Masters, Zitkála-Šá: Trailblazing American Indian Composer and Writer](#) (2020)
 - [National Public Radio, "This Land Is My Land: The Story Of Reies López Tijerina"](#) (2017)
 - [Rumel Fuentes, "El Corrido de Reies Lopez Tijerina"](#)
- Discussion: Indigenous and Mexican American Wests
- Week 12 Quiz due April 12

Week 14 (April 13-19)

- Lecture: The Modern West, 1980-2025
- Reading: Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 322-349
- Discussion: Reconsidering the West
- Week 13 Quiz due April 19

Week 15 (April 20-26)

- Lecture: Silicon Valley
- Reading: Beaton, *Ducks*, 9-196
- Discussion: Going to the Tar Sands
- Week 14 Quiz due April 26
- Check In #2

Week 16 (April 27-29)

- Lecture: Line in the Sand
- Reading: Beaton, *Ducks*, 199-afterword
- Discussion: Leaving the Tar Sands
- Week 15 Quiz due April 29
- Final Draft due May 3