History 468/568:  
The American West since 1850  

Oregon State University  
Extended Campus  

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OSU catalog description: Important themes in the transformation of western America from the pre-industrial world of Native Americans to the emergence of the region as a major force in the cultural, economic, and political life of the United States.  

E-campus version 4 credits  

Expanded Course Description:  

This course, the second in a two-part series, explores the history of North American places that different people have called or imagined to be “the West” from 1850 to the present. We start by examining the West in the era of the U.S. Civil War and exploring how the region went through its own “civil war of incorporation” in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. In this civil war of incorporation, different groups of westerners, including Indian peoples, people of Spanish-Mexican descent, working-class people, and farmers contended and tried to reshape the process by which western peoples, lands, and resources would be integrated into the American nation. By examining key moments of western dissent, we will explore how the process of making the West “American” was often fraught with violence and conflict.  

As we move into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, we will look at processes of migration and community-building in the West. We will pay particular attention to the border-crossing experiences of peoples from Latin America and Asia and the formation of distinctive ethnic communities across a variety of western landscapes. World War II fundamentally reshaped these ethnic communities as some groups of westerners gained new opportunities for economic advancement and civil rights while others experienced renewed discrimination and dispossession. As we near the end of the term, we will explore how the legacies of World War II contributed to the growth of civil rights movements that were distinctly western in their outlook and goals. All the while, we will consider the process of western mythmaking and how Americans have remembered the region’s complicated history.
**Prerequisites:** Upper-division standing, or HST 201, 202, or 203.

**Student Learning Outcomes:**

- Through course readings and discussions, students will learn to identify the key economic, social, and cultural processes—including industrialization, migration, cultural diversity, and mythmaking—that have made the West’s regional history distinctive from that of other North American regions.
- By reading comparative historical accounts on transnational migrations, borders, and borderlands, students will be able to analyze the West’s history in a global context and to explain how movements of goods and people linked the region to places outside the political boundaries of the United States.
- Students will come away from the course with the ability to read secondary works by historians critically and analytically. Through papers and class discussions, they will learn to identify and summarize historians’ theses and arguments; to analyze the structure of historical narratives; to evaluate historians’ use of primary sources; and to present their own critique of historians’ interpretations of the West’s past.

**Required Readings:** Each week, students will be responsible for reading lectures on Blackboard and sections of the assigned books. The books for the course include both primary sources—texts produced by people who witnessed historical events first-hand—and secondary accounts—interpretations written by historians long after the fact. All of the books are available for purchase at the OSU Bookstore and copies are on reserve at Valley Library. The required texts are:


**Student Responsibilities and Communication:**

This syllabus is your handbook for the course and contains everything you need to know about the schedule, assignments, expectations, and deadlines. Please familiarize yourself with it and refer to it frequently. I will post weekly announcements to keep the class informed about upcoming assignments and deadlines, but students are ultimately responsible for familiarizing themselves with the course schedule and keeping track of deadlines for the assignments.

It is also crucial for you to stay in communication through your ONID e-mail account for the duration of the course. Important course announcements and feedback on your work will come on your ONID e-mail. In order to succeed in the course and keep caught up, it is crucial that you check your ONID account, as well as our Blackboard course page, on a
very regular basis. Each student must make arrangements to have access to a computer, e-mail, and Blackboard during the entire term.

Course Requirements and Grading

The grade breakdown for the course is as follows:

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<th>Requirement</th>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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1. On-line Discussion (25%):
I have set up an on-line discussion board for this course. To access the discussion board, go to our course page on Blackboard and click on the “Discussion Board” link on the left-hand side. Click on the HST 468/568 discussion forum link and look for the relevant thread to post your responses.

You must participate in discussion during **seven weeks** in order to receive full credit for your discussion grade. The weeks you participate are entirely your choice, with one exception: you must participate in the Week 7 discussion of the film *High Noon* (see below for more details). You should also note that there will be no discussion option during Week 5 during the midterm exam. Your responses need to be substantive—at least one to two full paragraphs long—and relevant to the week’s readings. Short or superficial posts will not receive full credit. Your discussion grade will be determined by the quality and insight of your posts. Additional posts beyond the minimum of two per week will also improve your discussion grade.

To receive credit for the discussion portion of your grade, you must post **two responses** to the discussion board during the weeks that you have chosen to participate. The first of these messages must answer one of the discussion questions about the week’s reading that I have provided on this syllabus. You must conclude this response by posing a discussion question to the other students in the course. To receive full credit for discussion participation you must submit your initial post by Friday of each week. For your second weekly response, you must post a response to another student’s discussion question by **Sunday** of each week.

2. Midterm and Final Exam (worth 25% each): The midterm and final exams will each consist of two essays of 3 - 4 pages each. Each essay is worth 50% of the exam grade. The essay questions will ask you to bring together and analyze information from all course materials, including readings and lectures. The questions will be provided via Blackboard two weeks before each exam is due. The midterm exam is due by Friday of the fifth week by 7 p.m.; the final exam is due by Friday of finals week by 7 p.m.

3. Western Film Analysis Paper (25%): During Week 7, we will be discussing the western as a genre of film and its relationship to the mythic and historical West. All
students will locate and screen the film *High Noon* and discuss it during Week 7. You will also write a paper on this subject. Your task for this paper is to view one other feature-length western outside of class and write an analytical essay that considers its relationship to the themes and ideas we have discussed in the course. The paper should be four to five pages long, double-spaced, with standard margins. It is due by Friday of the eighth week of the term by 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time. A detailed paper guide will be posted well in advance of the due date.

Some questions you might consider in the paper include: How does the western you watched reflect, depart from, or overturn the conventions of the “classic” western? What similarities or differences do you see between your western and *High Noon*? How are different aspects of western history portrayed in the film and how does its version of the West’s history correspond with or conflict with the history we have explored in this class? How does the film build up, or break down, western mythologies?

For the paper, you should choose a western from the following list. You may, however, choose to write on a western that is not on this list so long as you get approval from Prof. Smith.

- *Stagecoach* (1939)  
- *The Ox-bow Incident* (1943)  
- *My Darling Clementine* (1946)  
- *The Searchers* (1956)  
- *Rio Bravo* (1959)  
- *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964)  
- *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964)  
- *Cat Ballou* (1965)  
- *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* (1966)  
- *Little Big Man* (1970)  
- *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971)  
- *Buffalo Bill and the Indians* (1976)  
- *Pale Rider* (1985)  
- *Dances with Wolves* (1990)  
- *Unforgiven* (1992)  
- *The Ballad of Little Jo* (1993)  
- *Posse* (1993)  
- *Tombstone* (1993)  
- *The Quick and the Dead* (1995)  
- *3:10 to Yuma* (1957 or 2007)

**Requirements for Graduate Students:**

Graduate students will complete all of the required assignments listed above, except for the exams. In lieu of the exams, graduate students will write a 12-15 page research, historiographic, or literature review paper on a western history topic. Graduate students should correspond with me about potential paper topics throughout the term and submit a 1-2 page paper proposal by Wednesday of the seventh week. The final paper is due on Friday of finals week at 7 p.m. All graduate coursework is graded separately from that of undergraduate students and will be held to a graduate-level standard of work.

The grade breakdown for graduate students will be as follows:

- On-line discussion 25%
- Western film analysis paper 25%
- Final paper 50%
Course Grading and Policies

Final course grades will be calculated as follows:

- 100 – 94% = A
- 93 – 90% = A-
- 90 – 86% = B+
- 89 – 86% = B
- 85 – 83% = B-
- 80 – 82% = C+
- 79 – 76% = C
- 75 – 73% = C-
- 72 – 70% = D+
- 69 – 66% = D
- 65 – 63% = D-
- 62 – 60% = D-
- Below 60% = F

**Late Papers Policy:** Late papers will drop by one step for each calendar day that they are late. For instance, an “A” paper becomes an A- after one day late, a B+ after two days late, and etc. I will not accept papers more than one week late. Students who turn in late papers are responsible for making arrangements to get them to me and confirming that I received them. Please note that I will not accept late final exams or graduate final papers under any circumstances as the deadline for submitting final grades falls quickly after the due date.

**Students with disabilities:** Students who have special needs should contact Disability Access Services (DAS) immediately to have alternate accommodations approved. The contact number for DAS is 737-4098. Students who have approved accommodations must contact me during the first week of the term to discuss their needs.

**Statement on Academic Honesty:** All assignments submitted for this course must be your own original work. Text and ideas taken from other sources (including books and the Internet) must be properly and fully cited. Guidelines for citing sources will be distributed with all assignments. Plagiarism (whether it involves copying from an outside source or another student) and cheating of any kind will result in an automatic zero for the assignment. Instances of plagiarism and cheating will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please consult the OSU Student Conduct and Community Standards website at [http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/stuacdis.htm](http://oregonstate.edu/admin/stucon/stuacdis.htm).

**Course evaluation**

We encourage you to engage in the course evaluation process each term – online, of course. The evaluation form will be available toward the end of each term, and you will be sent instructions by Ecampus. You will login to “Student Online Services” to respond to the online questionnaire. The results on the form are anonymous and are not tabulated until after grades are posted.

**Course Schedule and Reading Assignments**

**Week 1:**

**Course Introduction/Native Homelands**

Readings due this week:

- Course Lectures: “What is the West and Where is It?” and “The Western Civil War of Incorporation”
Assignments due this week:

- **On-line discussion:** You have two on-line discussion tasks this week:
  - Familiarize yourself with our on-line class discussion forum and introduce yourself to the class. Use the instructions provided under the heading “On-line Discussion” above to access the class discussion forum. Find the thread entitled “Introductions” and introduce yourself in a short post. Tell us where you are from, talk a bit about your major or course of study, and let us know what brought you to this course. This introduction is mandatory and does NOT count as one of your seven participation assignments.
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *The Contested Plains* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - Why do you think that Elliott West wrote this book? How does he want to change or challenge the way we think about the history of the West, the Great Plains, the environment, or American Indian peoples?
    - Do you think Elliott West is suggesting that Plains Indians like the Cheyenne were in large part responsible for the environmental disasters and hardships that they suffered? If so, do you think this argument is fair and accurate or were there other major factors that contributed to Native Americans’ difficulties?

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**Week 2:**

**Incorporating the West**

Readings due this week:

- Course Lecture: “Mining the West”

Assignments due this week:

- **On-line discussion:**
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *The Contested Plains* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - Elliott West organizes much of this book around the concept of “visions,” suggesting that different groups’ visions of the landscape were responsible for causing the clash of cultures on the Plains. What do you see as the main differences between Native peoples’ visions of the Plains and white settlers’ visions? Are these visions necessarily in conflict with each other? In the end, how useful do you think the concept of “visions” is to explaining what was happening on the Plains during the Colorado gold rush?
    - Mixed families made up of white traders and Native wives play a major part in this story. Why do you think interracial marriage
played such an important role in the era before the Colorado gold rush? Why do you think some intermarried white traders thrived in the new social world of the gold rush and why did others find themselves and their mixed families pushed to the margins?

**Week 3:**
**Contesting the Plains**

Readings due this week:
- Course Lecture: “Contesting the Plains,” parts 1 and 2

Assignments due this week:
- **On-line discussion:**
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *The Contested Plains* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - West makes a startling assertion: The amount of gold and goods produced in Colorado never came close to equaling the capital that investors poured into the region. Yet, white Americans kept throwing money at Colorado because they were dead set on making their dreams for the Plains a reality. What do you think of this argument? Once white Americans started dreaming that Colorado would become a prosperous frontier area did their dreams almost become self-fulfilled prophesies?
    - Throughout the book, West refers to the Cheyenne way of life as being “doomed” in the face of white settlement because two groups of people could not live out such different dreams on the same Plains landscape. Was Indian decline really inevitable or could natives and newcomers have worked out a different environmental vision that made room for both Native peoples and whites? If so, what do you think this vision would have looked like?

**Week 4:**
**Violence on the Range**

Readings due this week:
- Course Lecture: “Making the Range,” Parts 1 and 2
- Johnson, *Violence in the West*, 1-22, 37-80.

Assignments due this week:
- **On-line discussion:**
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the documents in Johnson on the Johnson County Range War AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
Why do you think that James Averell and Ellen Watson (a.k.a. “Cattle Kate”) were lynched in 1889? How would their assailants have justified extralegal, vigilante violence against them? Finally, what role do you think gender played in the incident?

How did state and federal authorities intervene in the Johnson County Range War? Who did they tend to support in the conflict and why do you think they took this stance?

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**Week 5:**

Making Nations, Making Borders: The State, Migration, and Identity in the West

Readings due this week:

- Course Lectures: “Making the Federal Landscape,” “Life on the Border,” and “The Trans-Pacific West”

Assignments due this week:

- Midterm Exam due Friday of Week 5 at 7 p.m. Pacific Time
- No on-line discussion due this week

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**Week 6:**

Class and Conflict in the West

Readings due this week:

- Course Lectures: “Agrarian Protest” and “Industrial Protest”
- Johnson, *Violence in the West*, 18-31, 82-143.

Assignments due this week:

- On-line discussion:
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the documents in Johnson on Ludlow Massacre AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - The Ludlow strikers called the incident on April 20, 1914 the “Ludlow Massacre” while their opponents dubbed it the “Battle of Ludlow.” How did these names reflect the attitudes of people on each side and which term do you think is most accurate?
    - Compare the Ludlow Massacre to the Johnson County Range War. Are the two events inherently similar or dissimilar? Do you think they reflect some inherent truth about the nature of violence in the West?

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**Week 7:**

Hollywood’s West

Readings due this week:

- Course Lecture: “The World of the Western,” Parts I and II

Assignments due this week:

- Locate and screen a copy of *High Noon*. Then post a short reaction piece to the film on our discussion board. You might answer some of the following questions:
What did you find most interesting or surprising about the film? In what ways does it fit the mold of a “classic western” (as outlined in the Power Points this week) and in what ways does it break out of that mold? How are race and gender portrayed in this film? What do you make of the ending?

**Week 8:**
**World War II Transformations**

**Readings due this week:**
- Course Lecture: “The West at War,” Parts 1 and 2

**Assignments due this week:**
- Western Film Analysis paper due Friday of Week 8 at 7 p.m. Pacific Time
- On-line discussion:
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *Race Work* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - Why do you think that Whitaker chose to make this book largely biographical and to focus on the lives of Eleanor and Lincoln Ragsdale? What do you think are the benefits and the drawbacks to this approach for understanding the history of black Americans and civil rights in the West?
    - Why do you think WWII was such a turning point for black Americans? After reading the Power Point on WWII in the West for this week, how do you think the wartime experiences of African Americans compare to that of other ethnic and racial groups in the West?

**Week 9:**
**Civil Rights Movements in the West**

**Readings due this week:**
- Course Lecture: “Western Civil Rights,” Parts 1 and 2
- On-line discussion:
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *Race Work* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
  - Please note: if you choose to participate this week, your posts and responses are not due until Monday following the Thanksgiving holiday.
    - What kinds of difficulties or problems did the Ragsdales’ civil rights activism cause for their business and personal lives? Do you think that they were generally willing to sacrifice economic success and happy family life for the cause of civil rights? Do you
think that they “sold out” when they retreated from public life in the late 1960s and changed their business model?

- How did new, more militant, black civil rights activism change the tone of African American civil rights struggles across the country, across the West, and in Phoenix in the 1960s? Do you think Whitaker treats this new radical black activism fairly or do you think he is much more sympathetic to the Ragsdales and their approach?

**Week 10:**

**Is the West still Western?: The West at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century**

**Readings due this week:**

- Course Power Points: “Sagebrush Rebellions” and “Which Way West?”
- Whitaker, *Race Work*, Chapters 6 - 7 and conclusion

**Assignments due this week:**

- **On-line discussion:**
  - Respond to one of the following sets of questions on the readings in *Race Work* for this week AND respond to another student’s discussion question.
    - Who or what do you think was responsible for the lack of cooperation between Mexican American and African American civil rights activists in Phoenix?
    - Do you think that the Ragsdales and their emphasis on black economic upward mobility and entrepreneurship were realistic or relevant by the 1980s and 1990s? Do you think it was fair of other African American leaders to criticize the Ragsdales for being elitist and out of touch with the problems facing poor black communities?

**Final Exams due by 7:00 p.m. Pacific Time, Friday of Finals Week**