History 464: Trans-Mississippi West

Roberts 312
T R 12:45-2:00
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In his 1930 poem, “American Letter,” Archibald MacLeish declared that “America is West and the wind blowing.” The ways in which Americans have thought about the west and the frontier has provided the ingredients for much of American identity. This course examines the fundamental tension and formative conflict in American history and culture between progress and civilization, on the one hand, and nostalgia and a sense of loss for what that progress alters on the other. This tension is embodied in the idea of the American West. The goal of the course is to ground the history and ideas about the west to the rest of American history and to show how the two are inextricably intertwined. As such, this class will be as much about American cultural history than perhaps the west itself. It will be 2/3 lecture and 1/3 discussion on the readings and lecture topics.

All Readings are on Electronic Reserve, access to which is found on the Library’s web page

Week One: August 30-September 1
Introduction to Course
Overview
Reading: The West as America: “Ideology and Image: Justifying Westward Expansion”
“Panning the West as America: Or Why One Exhibition did not strike Gold”

Week Two: September 6 & 8
Jefferson and the West, the First Western Hero
Reading: Jefferson on Manufacturers

Week Three: September 13 & 15
The Market Revolution and the Rise of the Romantic Sublime
Reading: Thoreau, Walking
The Poetry of Van Alstyne and Sigourney
Burke on the Sublime

Week Four: September 20 & 22
Nature, Art and the West and Manifest Destiny and “Progress”
Reading: Turner, the Frontier Thesis

Week Five: September 27 & 29
The Indian in Science and Culture
Reading: “Reduced to Images: American Indians in 19th Century Advertising”
Horseman, “Superior and Inferior Races”
Week Six: October 4 & 6
The Industrial East and the Immigrant and the Crisis of Manliness and the Rise of the Cowboy Hero
Reading: Wister, The Evolution of a Cow Puncher
Remington, “Events of the ----of July”
Nicholas, “The Battle Over Westernness”
Roosevelt, The Strenuous Life and Civilized and Barbarian Virtues
Wister, The Virginian

Week Seven: October 11 & 13
The Consequences of Progress and the Progressive Movement
Reading: Boy Scouts of America, Seton
The Drift to the Cities, G.S. Dickerson
Conservation of Natural Resources, Roosevelt
The Need of Conserving the Beauty and Freedom of Nature, Eliot
Country Life and Nature Study, Liberty Hyde Bailey
The Wilderness, George Evans

Week Eight: October 18 & 20
Conserving the West and the Rise of Modernism
Reading: Cronon, “The Trouble With Wilderness”
West, “Selling the Myth: Western Images in Advertising”

Week Nine: October 25 & 27
Modernism and the West and 1950s America
Reading: Torgovnick, Defining the Primitive
Handle and Lewis on Authenticity
Tompkins, West of Everything, “Women and the Language of Men”

Week Ten: November 1 & 3
Paper Topic Consults

Week Eleven: November 8 & 10
McCarthyism and High Noon, “High Noon” Part I
Reading: Nicholas, “A Museum, Celebrations, and Yale”
Lardner Interview, Tender Comrades

Week Twelve: November 22 & November 23
“High Noon” Part II
NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK
Week Thirteen: November 29 & December 1
The Sixties and the Refutation of Progress and “Little Big Man” Part I
Reading: Deloria, *Playing Indian*, Chapter 6
Alexie, *White Men Can’t Drum*
*“Going Indian: Discovery, Adoption and Renaming Toward a “True American” from Deerslayer to Dances with Wolves”*

Week Fourteen: December 6 & 8
The New Age West and Deconstructing the West
Reading: White, “Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?”
Lundbland, “Patagonia, Gary Snyder, and the ‘Magic’ of Wilderness”

Assignments:
*Two take home exams* of 3-5 pages that connect the assigned reading to the context it fits into. Answer *one* of the following questions per exam (or answer one of your own, with prior approval). Make sure you connect and refer to *both* the reading and the historical context that it is a part of.

* How does an understanding of Jefferson’s vision for America help explain the development of the United States? How is it reflected in Crevecour? What repercussions did this vision have for American history, and for whom?

* How did the Market Revolution influence the view of the West? How is this reflected in Thoreau and the Romantics? How is landscape art a part of this vision?

* How does your understanding of turn of the century America explain Owen Wister and Frederic Remington’s cowboy icon?

* Why did the Boy Scouts, the Conservation Movement, and the Arts and Crafts movement all develop at the same time?

* How did Modernists use the West in their vision and art? How did they use the West as a place of primitivism and authenticity in their societal criticism?

* How were the icons and ideology of the West useful to the fight against Communism during the 1950s?

* How were Native Americans and the “rural” both a vital part of the Counter Culture movement and the politics of the 60s?

15% each: These can be handed in anytime during the semester but BOTH must be handed in before the end of November. My advice is to schedule these now, well in advance, so you are not scrambling to turn both in at the end of November.
First long essay: Write a 4-6 page paper on how Americans’ ideas of the West affected their treatment of it as a space? How did their understandings of the west, at different times, shape the western space? (How did Jefferson’s notions about democracy, for example, affect how the western space ultimately looked? How did that, in turn, affect the fate of the western environment? Politics? How did changes in thinking about nature and the wild shape the western space in the early 20th century?) 25% Due: OCTOBER 27

Second paper: This paper is meant to be a research paper in which you will use at least four outside sources. The assignment is to pick something from the past or present to deconstruct: a photograph, movie, television or print ad, novel or consumer item (a North Face jacket?). Then, in a 7-10 page paper discuss how cultural ideas of the west have made meaning of that item/event/place, etc. How have our ideas of the west been reflected in what you have chosen to deconstruct? What conclusions can you draw from this? Make sure that you contextualize your item, i.e. how does history or the frames of the past help us to understand its current meaning and use? 30% Due: THURSDAY DECEMBER 8

Participation: It is critical that you have not only done the reading for the week by Tuesday, but that you are also prepared to discuss the assigned reading in an informed way. I would do all the reading for the week during the weekend so you are ready to discuss it on either Tuesday or Thursday. 15%

PLEASE NO LATE PAPERS WITHOUT PRIOR APPROVAL!