THE AMERICAN WEST

T, R: 12:30-1:50 PM
Curry Hall 322
University of North Texas

Professor Michael D. Wise
(michael.wise@unt.edu)
Office: Wooten Hall 259
Hours: W 2:00-4:50 PM


Stay in one place long enough, or return to the same place often enough, and some interesting ironies are likely to accumulate.

-Larry McMurtry, Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen

Course Description:
What is the “American West?” The phrase refers both to a region and to a set of historical processes. Both conjure a broad array of ideas about the United States that have long guided popular interpretations of the nation’s history and political life.

Our class begins with a discussion of how two ideas, the “wilderness” and the “frontier,” have structured past and present understandings of western history. The course then moves chronologically through western history, starting with the encounters of Indigenous and European empires from the 1500s through the 1800s, and tracing how movement and conquest constitute recurring processes in the region’s ongoing colonial history. Next we will study the region’s twentieth-century economic and environmental histories, paying close attention to how the West’s human and non-human forces have affected modern developments across the rest of the country and the globe. Beyond the American West itself, this course also explores the everyday relationships between historical narratives and experiences of place.

Course Texts:


Grading Criteria:

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<tr>
<td>Take-Home Exams 1-5</td>
<td>90% (18% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Facilitation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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Blackboard:
Electronic course materials will be available as PDF files on the Blackboard Learn website.

**Course Policies:**

**Attendance and Behavior**
Students are expected to attend all sessions and to complete reading assignments before class. Electronic devices may be used for note-taking purposes only. Cell phones must be powered off or silenced. I will start class promptly at 12:30 PM. Late students are permitted to enter the classroom provided they do so with minimal disruption to their peers.

**Discussion Facilitation**
There are five class sessions set aside for the formal discussion of course readings and lectures. During the first half of the class, students will separate into small groups and work on answering a set of pre-circulated questions. The class will then reunite during the second half, and each group will take a few minutes to present their answers. It might be helpful to think of these like informal quizzes. Students will be graded on their preparation, professionalism, and participation in these discussions. If you miss class on the day of a discussion, you may receive partial credit by writing an excellent two-page response essay to that day’s reading assignment.

**Take-Home Exams**
The main evaluation method for this course is a series of four take-home exams. For the first three exams, students will be expected to answer one essay question, writing a double-spaced, 4-6 page response. For the fourth exam (which doubles as the final exam), students will respond to two essay questions. In total, each student will write between 20 and 30 pages for this course. The best exam essays will be well written and will offer clear answers grounded with textual evidence from course readings. Late exams will only be accepted in the case of an emergency that conforms to official university policy.

**University Policy Statements:**

**Disability Statement**
Any student with special circumstances covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act should register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA), Suite 322, University Union Building (phone 940-565-4323). Students who have registered with ODA should also make an appointment to discuss disabilities accommodation requests with the instructor of this course during the first week of class. Reasonable adjustments will be made to accommodate the special needs of students with disabilities where such adjustments are necessary to provide equality of educational access.

**Academic Integrity**
Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of Academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of “F” in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. The official policy and procedure are located online at: http://vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm.
Part One:
WILDERNESS AND THE AMERICAN WEST

Week 1:
T, Aug 30  Course Introduction: Place and Process

R, Sep 1  Where is the American West?
READ:

Week 2:
T, Sep 6  The Frontier Thesis
READ:
*Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American
  History,” 1893.

R, Sep 8  The Wilderness Idea
READ:

Week 3:
T, Sep 13 Discussion Day #1
READ:
*William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the
  Wrong Nature,” in Uncommon Ground, ed. Cronon (New York: Norton,
Begin Take-Home Exam #1

R, Sep 15  The Spanish North
READ:
Andrés Reséndez, A Land So Strange: The Epic Voyage of Cabeza de
  Vaca, 1-68.

Week 4:
T, Sep 20 Take-Home Exam #1 Due
Film: Conquistadors, Pt. IV (PBS – Michael Wood)
R, Sep 22  
Ancient Native America  
READ:  

**Week 5:**

T, Sep 27  
The Horse and Indigenous Empires  
READ:  
Reséndez, 157-226.

R, Sep 29  
France, Spain, and Upper Louisiana  
READ:  
Part Two:
REMAKING THE WESTERN ENVIRONMENT

Week 6:
T, Oct 4  The Lewis & Clark (and other) Expeditions
READ:
*James Ronda, “Dreams and Discoveries”

R, Oct 6  Discussion Day #2
READ:

Week 7:
T, Oct 11  Indian Removal

R, Oct 13  Take-Home #2 Due
Film: Chicago: City of the Century (PBS – American Experience)

Week 8:
T, Oct 18  Grain and the Railroad
READ:

R, Oct 20  California and the Gold Rush
READ:

Week 9:
T, Oct 25  Cowboys and Indians and Meat
READ:

R, Oct 27  Discussion Day #3
READ:
(Extra Credit):
Adam Shprintzen Guest Lecture at UNT, Time and Place TBD
Week 10:

T, Nov 1  Allotment and Enclosure
            READ:
            *Karl Jacoby, “Class and Environmental History: Lessons from the War in
              the Adirondacks,” *Environmental History*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (July 1997):
              324-342.

R, Nov 3  The Western War of Incorporation
            READ:

Bonneville Dam Construction, Columbia River, 1936.
Part Three:
THE METROPOLITAN WEST

Week 11:

T, Nov 8 **Take-Home Exam #3 Due**
Films: *The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936); *The City* (1939); and *The Columbia* (1949).

R, Nov 10 **The Power of the River**
READ:

Week 12:

T, Nov 15 **The Dust Bowl**
READ:
White, 89-114.

R, Nov 17 **The Western Homefront During World War II**
READ:

Week 13:

T, Nov 22 **The Nuclear West**
READ:

R, Nov 24 **THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY (NO CLASS)**

Week 14:

T, Nov 29 **Termination and AIM**
READ:
*Woody Kipp, Vietcong at Wounded Knee*, excerpts.

R, Dec 1 **NO CLASS (PROFESSOR WISE AT A CONFERENCE)**

Week 15:

T, Dec 6 **Discussion Day #4**
READ:
*Mike Davis, “Fortress L.A.,” from *City of Quartz.*

Begin Take-Home Exam #4

History 4261-006 (Fall 2016)
Page 8
R, Dec 8  Discussion Day #5
   READ:
   Krakauer, 1-203.
   Begin Take-Home Exam #5

Finals Week:

R, Dec. 15  Take-Home Exams #4 and #5 Due at 12:30 PM in Curry Hall 322