



History 37200 (Fall 2025)
History of the American West

Dr. Dawn G. Marsh

Description

This course examines both “place” and “process” in the history of the U.S. West. The West is a region that is environmentally unique. First peopled by ancestral Native Americans and later, the object of Spanish, French, English, Russian, and finally American conquest and expansion. We will also study the West as a discrete region with a distinctive relationship to the U.S. federal government, discrete patterns of race relations, and a storied place in American cultural memory. The temporal focus of the course begins with the late 18th century and continues to the early 20th century. The course is structured on lectures and workshops. Your success in the course depends on your active participation in all aspects of the class.

Course Objectives

- The primary objective of this course is to dispel stereotypes, crush racism, develop empathy for the human condition and encourage you to value the history and culture of the American West.
- Clearly articulate historical analysis in written responses, while demonstrating a strong understanding of historical concepts and terminology.
- Present the results of collaborative historical research. Work with team members during weekly workshops and share responsibilities for presenting the analyses and evidence discovered.
- Distinguish between primary and secondary sources, evaluate their reliability and bias.
- Evaluate historical evidence, identify cause-and-effect relationships, and analyze the complexities of historical events within their broader context.

- Reflect on the ethical implications of historical interpretation and the potential biases present in historical narratives.

Required Text

Robert V. Hine, John Mack Faragher, and John T. Coleman. *The American West: A New Interpretive History*, **Second Edition**, ISBN: 978-0-300-18517-1 You can also access the complete book (pdfs for each chapter) through the library at:

https://purdue.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/01PURDUE_PUWL/ufs51j/alma99170287804901081

Other assigned readings, videos, etc. are available on Brightspace and Kanopy:

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/purdue/>

Course Brightspace

The syllabus (and any updates), weekly reading assignments, workshop assignments, PPTs (after the class presentation), links to assigned readings, images, or videos, the midterm and final will all be available via Brightspace. Announcements and other updates as necessary will be emailed or messaged through Brightspace. All exams and other documents required will be uploaded to Brightspace as **Word** documents. **PDFs will not be graded.**

Course Preparation

Each Tuesday you are required to read and/or view the content assigned for the day **before** you come to class. The assigned content is the foundation for the lecture and discussion that day. Your ability to participate in class discussions depends on your preparation. If I sense that students are not completing the readings, I will use **random quizzes** to “inspire” your preparation.

Attendance

I will take roll at the beginning of each class meeting. More than **five absences** without notification will **impact your final grade**. Repeated tardiness or early departure will also be noted and **ultimately impact your final grade**. If you participate in university-sanctioned extra-curricular activities that will cause you to miss class, it is your responsibility to inform me as far in advance as possible.

Class Ethics

This class is intended to encourage open, informed discussions and I hope to protect and foster a classroom atmosphere that will encourage open and enlightened discourse in the class. Respect, open-mindedness, and tolerance will be the standard for all classroom discussions. If you encounter any bullying, unfair treatment, or have any negative experiences in my classroom or beyond due to other students, please consider my office, BRNG 6108, a place where you can voice those concerns to me.

Academic Integrity

Students are required to abide by the rules of academic honesty and integrity provided by Purdue University. Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated at any level in my classroom. Students who do so will receive an "F" for the course and will be adjudicated to the History Department Head.

Assessments

Midterm (100 pts)	Due: Thursday 10/16/2025
Final (100 pts)	Due: Tuesday 12/16/2025
Assignments (15-20 pts)	Variable dates (Thursdays)
Unannounced Quizzes	Variable points, variable dates

Workshop Assignments

Thursdays will be devoted to workshops and the associated assignments. Students will be organized into teams that will be assigned a task to complete. Groups will work together on the tasks, but each student will be responsible for their work in the class. If you do not complete the assignment or if you are absent on a Workshop Thursday, you forfeit those points. If you have university related extracurricular activities, you can submit the assignment **before the class meets** and receive credit. If you are absent due to illness, you can submit the assignment **within 24 hours** of the class meeting and receive credit. **Hardcopies of the assignments will be submitted for grading at the end of the class. Do not upload Workshop assignments in Brightspace.**

Midterm and Final

Both assessments will be comprehensive assignments that demonstrate your mastery of the course content relative to the dates they are scheduled. The assignments are due on the dates identified in the schedule and **submitted via Brightspace.**

- The Midterm assignment will be posted on Brightspace one week before the due date. Students who submit the Midterm late will be docked **5 points for each day late.**
- The Final assignment will be posted on Brightspace one week before the due date. **No late submissions of the Final assignment will be accepted.** If you fail to submit the Final by the deadline you will receive a 0 score. No exceptions.



Course Schedule

I reserve the right to make changes to this schedule as needs arise. Students will be informed about these changes through class emails, in-class announcements, and/or postings on Brightspace. Several class meetings will be cancelled due to professional obligations. Content and assignments will be made available through Brightspace for those course hours as needed.

Week 1 8/26-28

Tuesday: Intro and Administrative

Thursday: Read: Hine, Introduction: Dreams and Homelands



Week 2 9/2-4

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 1 “A New World Begins”

View: Ken Burns, The West. Episode 1, “The People”

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/purdue/video/137156>

Thurs: Workshop 1 Historical Map Analysis

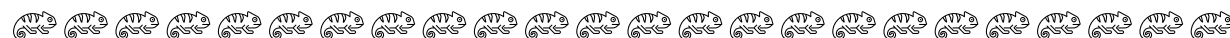


Week 3 9/9-11

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 4 “The Land and Its Markers”

Thurs: Workshop 2 Jefferson’s Lies

View:



Week 4 9/16-18

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 5 “Finding Purchase”

View: Ken Burns, The West. Episode 2, Empire Upon the Trails

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/purdue/watch/video/137154/137158>

Thurs: Workshop 3 The Oregon Trail



Week 5 9/23-25

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 6 “War and Destiny”

View: Foreigners in Their Own Land

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/purdue/video/123002>

Thurs: Workshop 4: Western Art



Week 6 9/30-10/2

Tues: Read: Hine, Ch 7 “Machine”

Thurs: Workshop 5: Little Big Horn Perspectives



Week 7 10/7-9

Tues: Read: Michael Bellesiles, “Western Violence,” Ch 9 in William Devereaux, ed. *A Companion to the American West*, Williston: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2007. *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/purdue/reader.action?docID=214123&ppg=174>

Thurs: Workshop 6 Racist Cartoon of the 19th Century West



Week 8 Fall Break 10/13-14

No class Thursday 10/16

Midterm due Thursday 10/16



Week 9 10/21-23

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 8, A Search for Community

Thurs: Workshop 7: Anti-immigration West



Week 10 10/28-30

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 9 “The Urban Frontier”

Thurs: Workshop 8: Then and Now Urban Cities



Week 11 11/4-11/6

Tues: Read: Hine, Chapter 10, New Frontiers

View: Ken Burns, National Parks “The Last Refuge”

<https://www.kanopy.com/en/purdue/video/137128>

Thurs: Workshop 9: National Parks



Week 12 11/11-13

Tues: Industrialized West: Ranches and Mines

Read: Dant, Sara. Chapter 4, “The Great Barbeque,” in *Losing Eden: An Environmental History of the American West*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023, 104-106.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/purdue/detail.action?docID=30508044>

Thurs: Workshop 10 TBD



Week 13 11/18-20

Tues: The New Gold: Water

Read: Brister, Evelyn. “Introduction: Building Sustainable Communities in the Intermountain West.” In *A Watershed Moment: The American West in the Age of Limits*, edited by Robert Frodemam, Evelyn Brister, and Luther Propst, 1–16. The University of Utah Press, 2024.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.21126146.6?seq=1>

Thurs: Workshop 11 TBD



Week 14 11/25

Tues: How the West was Filmed (no class)

Read: Carter, Matthew. “Introduction,” in *Myth of the Western: New Perspectives on Hollywood's Frontier Narrative*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014, 1-25.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/purdue/reader.action?docID=1698591&ppg=31>

View:

Film 1: Classic Western

Film 2: Contemporary Western

Thurs: Holiday



Week 15 12/2-4

Tues: Film 1 Workshop

Thurs: Film 2 Workshop



Week 16 12/9-11

No class meeting: Extended office hours



Finals Week 12/15-20

Hist 372 Final Due Tues 12/16



Happy Trails!