HIS 406B: U.S. West Since 1849

David M. Wrobel  
David.wrobel@ccmail.nevada.edu

Class Time: TTH, 11:30-12:45  
Office Hrs: TR, 10-11
Class Location: BEH 221  
Location: WRI B325
Credits: 3  
Phone: 895-5255

Description:
This course examines the Trans-Mississippi West in the period from the Mexican-American War right up to the very latest political and cultural developments in the region in the early twenty-first century. We will consider the West as the edge of an empire in our coverage of the war against Mexico and the wars against Indian nations. We will also consider the West as an arid and fragile region and examine the connections between environment and political, economic, and cultural developments. While home to many of the nation’s largest “open spaces” the nation’s most environmentally fragile region is also its most metropolitan one and we will examine the role of the West as a metropolitan trend-setter. In addition, as we explore political developments in the region from the Progressive Era to the present, we will consider the West as a region of ideological extremes—from the 1960s and 1970s counterculture to Sunbelt conservatism and the more recent extreme right wing militias. Lastly, we will examine the role the West plays in the national and international consciousness through analysis of representations of the region in art, literature, film, television, and advertizing.

Objectives: The course is designed to provide an understanding of the contemporary U.S. West in deep historical context and an appreciation for regionalism as a category of analysis. In addition, the course is designed to nurture effective writing and critical reading skills.

Required Reading: There are five required books for the course; a novel (Steinbeck), a biography (Worster), a synthetic study (Abbott), a single-authored essay collection (Limerick) and an edited collection (Roche, ed.). Much of the course revolves around discussion of these readings and at least one of these books will become the starting point for your research paper. Please keep up with the course readings assignments; they are clearly outlined in the Course schedule.

Carl Abbott, How Cities Won the West: Four Centuries of Urban Change in Western North America (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008). Abbott’s recently published synthesis of western urban history makes a strong case for the primary importance of cities in the history of the western region, for the distinctiveness of the western urban experience, and for the impact of modern western urban models on the nation. We will read sections of How Cities Won the West throughout the semester. Abbott is generally recognized as the leading historian of western cities.
Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Something in the Soil: Legacies and Reckonings in the New West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000). Limerick’s collection of essays covers a wide range of topics from Mormonism and the Gold Rush to modern environmentalism. We will read selected essays from the book throughout the semester. Limerick, recipient of a MacArthur Foundation Genius Award, is also the author of *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, 2006), which is generally considered to be the seminal text of the New Western History.

Jeff Roche, ed., *The Political Culture of the New West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008). Roche’s collection includes a wide range of essays on the various political arenas—racial, environmental, ideological, economic, etc.—of the contemporary West. Included among the contributors are two members of the UNLV History Department. This book will be our core reading for Part III of the course.

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin 20th Century Classics, 2006; 1939). Arguably the greatest American novel of the twentieth century, Steinbeck’s masterpiece examines the impact of economic depression and ecological disaster on the Southern Plains, the mass exodus of residents of that region to California, and the terrible conditions they faced in the “Promised Land.” The theme of the “myth of the West” is one of the “five layers” of the novel and one that we will pay special attention to. *The Grapes of Wrath* will be our core reading for Part II of the course.


Requirements: There is a midterm (in-class and take-home portions), a final, and a short research paper (6-8 pages). Each of these assignments will count for 25% of your course grade. The remaining 25% will be based on your contributions to class discussion. Discussions will center on the required course readings. All class members will be responsible for leading at least one discussion of a chapter from one of the course books.

Grading: The +/- grading system will be used. The grading scale is as follows:

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Attendance: Attendance is expected in this class. If you do not attend you will not be able to participate in interactive lectures or discussions, and thus will be unfamiliar with the topical coverage provided in class, and this will lead to poor performance on exams and paper assignments. If your unexcused absences exceed more than twice the number of weekly meetings (i.e. four absences) you can be administratively dropped from the course; at the very least your discussion grade will be lowered significantly by poor attendance. All legitimate absences (e.g., medical, family emergencies) are excusable.

Discussion: This is an upper division course and you should come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. There is a direct causal relationship between the ability to discuss the readings intelligently and actually having read them. I may, on an impromptu basis, call on individuals to introduce us to the key themes of any particular chapter; please be prepared for this. You will deliver a brief presentation on your short research paper and your performance will be factored into your discussion grade.

Midterm & Final Exams: The midterm consists of: 1). In-class exam (75 minutes) comprised of 7 TRIAD sets; you will write on 4; and 2). Take-home essay on the course readings we have covered up to that point in the course. The final is comprised of an essay on course readings, 2 TRIAD sets and 2 “Reading Comprehension” (RC) sets; you will have 4 TRIADS and 4 RCs to choose from. The final is not comprehensive; it covers just the themes and readings studied since the midterm.

The exams are designed to gauge your understanding of and reflection upon the material, not merely your memorization skills. The exam essays (take-home essay on the midterm and in-class essay on the final) require you to reflect carefully on the readings and arrive at conclusions of your own. TRIADS require you to identify each of the three items in the set, explain why they are significant and how they are connected. RC’s are each comprised of 3-4 questions on a passage from the course readings; the first questions ask you to identify the passage and its historical context; subsequent questions ask you to analyze the passage’s meaning and relate it to broad course themes.

Papers: Your short research paper must draw on several of the course readings and construct a question that further research, beyond the course readings, can answer. We will devote one full class session to an overview of western history sources in the Lied Library and another session to library research for the paper. You will be required to submit a 250-word typed paper abstract in advance of proceeding with the topic of your choice. The purpose of the abstract is: a) to ensure that you get feedback from me at the beginning of the process; b) to make sure your topic is a viable one; and c) to make sure you begin work on the topic at a reasonable time in the semester.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, grammatically sound, and carefully proofed. Direct quotations, and/or paraphrasing should be cited in footnotes or endnotes, or in APA style (i.e. in parentheses). Essays should be 6-8 pages long (1,800-2,400 words), in 12 point Times New Roman font. Essays must have a title that reflects the key theme/s of the paper or key question/s that it addresses. See Appendix 1: Guide to Effective Paper Writing. Also take a moment to read “Limerick’s Rules of Verbal Etiquette.”
**Active Reading:** Take the time to read assigned materials carefully and actively. It is often helpful, for example, to make marginal comments in the books. If you disagree with a particular point that an author is making, then make a note to that effect in the margin. You will find it helpful to write a brief summary of each chapter as you complete it. Consider the following questions:
1) What major points is the author trying to make?
2) What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her arguments?
3) What are the author's biases, preferences, and viewpoint?
4) How does the author's coverage compare with class coverage and with other readings?

**Academic Misconduct:** “Academic integrity is a legitimate concern for every member of the campus community: all share in upholding the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy and are encouraged when faced with choices to always take the ethical path. Students enrolling in UNLV assume the obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with UNLV’s function as an educational institution.”
An example of academic misconduct is plagiarism: “Using the words or ideas of another, from the Internet or any source, without proper citation of the sources.” See the “Student Academic Misconduct Policy” (approved December 9, 2005) located at: [http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html](http://studentlife.unlv.edu/judicial/misconductPolicy.html).

**Copyright:** The University requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. **You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The university will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws.** Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. To familiarize yourself with copyright and fair use policies, you are encouraged to visit the following website: [http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/](http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright/).

**Disability Resource Center (DRC):** The Disability Resource Center (DRC) coordinates all academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The DRC is the official office to review and house disability documentation for students, and to provide them with an official Academic Accommodation Plan to present to the faculty if an accommodation is warranted. Faculty should not provide students accommodations without being in receipt of this plan.

UNLV complies with the provisions set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, offering reasonable accommodations to qualified students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137, and the contact numbers are: Voice (702) 895-0866, TTY (702) 895-0652, fax (702) 895-0651. For additional information, please visit: [http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/](http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/).
**Religious Holidays:** If you miss a class assignment because of observance of a religious holiday you will have the opportunity to make it up. To be assured of this opportunity, please inform me of anticipated absences by Tuesday, January 20.

**Extracurricular Activities:** Students who represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity shall have the opportunity to make up assignments, but the student must provide me with official written notification no less than one week prior to the missed classes.

**Teaching and Learning Center:** [http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm](http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm)

**Rebel Mail:** According to university policy I will only e-mail your Rebel Mail account. You are responsible for checking your Rebel Mail account.
Tentative Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Part I: 1840s-1900: From Empire to Empire

Wk. 1: T, Jan. 13: Course Introduction: Where’s the West?
Reading: No Reading!
Wk. 1: R, Jan. 15: The West & America: Empires, Frontiers, Regions, and Memory
Reading: Limerick, “Introduction.”

Wk. 2: T, Jan. 20: Indian Wars and the Making of the West
Reading: Limerick, “Haunted America”; Worster, Prologue & Ch’s. 1 & 2
Wk. 2: R, Jan. 22: Gold Rushes & Consequences
Reading: Limerick, “John Sutter” and “The Gold Rush”; Worster, Ch. 3

Wk. 3: T, Jan. 27: Imagining the West into Being: Promoting Settlement
Reading: Abbott, “Introduction;” Worster, Ch’s. 4, 5 & 6
Wk. 3: R, Jan. 29: Remembering the Western Past: Mythology and Collective Memory
Reading: Abbott, Ch. 1; Roche, ed., Ch. 12; Worster, Ch. 7

Wk. 4: T, Feb. 3: The Growth of A Region: Western Development, 1862-1900
Reading: Worster, Ch. 8, 9 & 10
Wk. 4: R, Feb. 5: Consequences of Western Development, Pt. I: John Muir Discussion
Reading: Worster, Ch. 11

Wk. 5: T, Feb. 10: Western History Sources in Lied Library
Reading: Worster, Ch’s. 12, & 13
Wk. 5: R, Feb. 12: Consequences of Western Development, Pt. II: John Muir Discussion
Reading: Worster, Ch. 14 & Epilogue

Part II: 1900-1945: New West to New Deal & World War II

Wk. 6: T, Feb. 17: Midterm Exam, in-class portion
Reading: No Reading!
Wk. 6: R, Feb. 19: No Class: Midterm Exam, take-home portion due &
F, Feb. 20: David Kennedy Lecture, “Water in the West,” 7:30pm, SU
Reading: No Reading!

Wk. 7: T, Feb. 24: The Progressive West, & The Urban West, I: Abbott Discussion
Reading: Abbott, “Transitions” & Ch’s. 3-7
Wk. 7: R, Feb. 26: The Urban West, II: Abbott Discussion
Reading: Abbott, Ch’s. 8-9, “Transitions” & Ch. 10

Wk. 8: T, Mar. 3: The Reactionary West: Alien Land Laws, the Klan & Eugenics
Reading: Steinbeck, “Introduction” (by DeMott)
Wk. 8: R, Mar. 5: Great Depression & New Deals: We Have a Plan
Reading: Steinbeck, Ch’s. 1-7
Wk. 9: T, Mar. 10:  *The Grapes of Wrath*, I: Discussion  
Reading:  Steinbeck, Ch’s. 8-16
Wk. 9: R, Mar. 12: The Grapes of Wrath, Movie, Part I  
Reading:  Steinbeck, Ch’s. 17-20; Roche, ed., Ch. 5

Wk. 10: T, Mar. 17: The Grapes of Wrath, Movie, Part 2  
Reading:  Steinbeck, Ch’s. 21-26
Reading:  Steinbeck, Ch’s. 27-30; Limerick, “Disorientation & Reorientation”

**Part III: 1945-Present: Cold War West to Contemporary West**

Wk. 11: T, Mar 24: The Modern Urban West, I  
Reading:  Abbott, Ch’s. 11-14
Wk. 11: R, Mar. 26: The Modern Urban West, II  
Reading:  Abbott, Ch. 15 & “Conclusion”

Wk. 12: T, Mar. 31: The Cold War West: Nevada Test Site Oral History Project  
Reading:  Roche, ed., Ch’s. 3, 4 & 8
Wk. 12: R, Apr. 2: Library Research  
Reading:  Reading pertinent to your research paper!

**April 6-11: Spring Break**

Reading:  No Reading: Research Paper Abstracts Due
Wk. 13: R, Apr. 16: The Radical West, II: Berkeley in the Sixties, Part II  
Reading:  No Reading: Western Universities in the Sixties: Submission of two images with accompanying text for class film. Abstracts returned.

Wk. 14: T, Apr. 21: The Conservative West  
Reading:  Roche, ed., “Introduction” & Ch’s. 1 & 2
Wk. 14: R, Apr. 23: Race & Ethnicity in the Contemporary West  
Reading:  Roche, ed., Ch’s. 6-8; Limerick, “Peace Initiative”

Wk. 15: T, Apr. 28: The Contemporary Western Environment  
Reading:  Roche, ed., Ch’s. 2 & 9-11; Limerick, “Mission to the Environmentalists”
Wk. 15: R, Apr. 30: Reflections on a Region  
*Research Paper Due in Class*  

**Finals Week: May 4-9:** Date of final TBA
Appendix 2: Guide to Effective Paper Writing:

I: Theme Development (Pre-writing): Papers need to be driven by a key theme or argument. Effective theme construction becomes possible only after reasoned reflection on the topic. As part of this reflective process consider the following guidelines:

1) Consider what you want to say before you begin; do not “make it up” as you go along.

2) Consider developing a paragraph-by-paragraph outline for the paper.

3) Think of an appropriate title. Thinking about titles can assist in theme construction and development.

4) Do not worry if there are loose ends in your thought processes before you begin writing; writing is part of the creative process, too, not just a mechanical exercise.

II: Draft Writing: Having reflected on the theme of your paper and the appropriate content to be covered, and having constructed a fairly detailed outline, you should begin writing a first draft. Consider the following guidelines as you write this draft:

1) Make sure your opening paragraph clearly outlines both the scope of your paper (the general content/issues to be covered) and its theme or argument.

2) If your essay draws on the work of other scholars, then make sure you demonstrate to the reader that you understand the themes/arguments presented in those works.

3) The bulk of your paper should present the relevant information/evidence necessary to flesh out the theme, or lend weight to the argument that you are making.

4) This presentation of evidence may include quotations from sources. Effective quotation is a delicate matter that requires great care. To quote a few lines from a source simply because they sound good, without fully comprehending their meaning or context, is very unwise. Instead, you should quote material that provides a sure indication of the point of view, or of some key point, or integral element of the author’s argument. Avoid long block quotations whenever possible. Short quotations, interspersed into your own narrative are effective and do not break up your narrative flow.

5) As you write the final paragraphs of your paper, make sure you have developed a strong conclusion. A concluding paragraph is most successful when it succinctly summarizes the information presented in the paper without sounding repetitious, and then closes with a strong, even memorable, sentence or two.

III: Rewriting: Having reflected on the paper’s theme and content and written a draft, you may be halfway through the assigned task. Consider the following guidelines as you turn your draft into an effective paper:
1) Set aside your first draft for a day and then come back to it. Distancing yourself from the paper (for a day or two, even an hour or two) will help you to assess its merits.

2) Read through the draft and check each of the guidelines under section II (above): Is your opening paragraph clear and effective? Have you demonstrated an understanding of the sources you draw on? Have you presented sufficient evidence/information to support your argument/develop your theme? Does the quoted material serve its proper purpose, i.e., does it illustrate key points/arguments/points of view? Does the paper's conclusion seem convincing to you the as you read it the next day?

3) If you find any shortcomings in the draft (and you almost certainly will) then correct them. This redrafting process may include a thorough rewriting of the whole paper, or rewriting of a few sections, or the re-ordering of certain paragraphs. You may even find that you need to reconsider your title. Remember: you are correcting a draft, so be hard on yourself, find every shortcoming you can.

4) Also check the draft carefully for grammatical shortcomings. Use the spelling and grammar function on the computer, but remember that computerized spelling and grammar checks are far from perfect; you should also proofread a printout of your paper. Are your tenses consistent? Is your sentence construction effective, i.e. do your sentences read smoothly and make perfect sense? Have you carefully divided material into paragraphs? Do you have strong transitional sentences to lead the reader from one paragraph to the next?

5) Now you should have in front of you a complete second draft of your paper. Whether you submit the second draft of you paper, or continue to go through the process outlined above, is your decision. Generally, the more drafts a paper goes through, the more effective the work becomes.