This course explores the history of western North America, focusing on the period since 1850. It introduces students to the key themes and interpretive problems in the study of the history of the West. It uses lectures, discussions, and video screenings to survey the contours of the modern West, paying particular attention to the political, economic, social, and cultural developments that have shaped it. At the same time, it looks beyond the boundaries of the region to consider how events in the rest of the United States, as well as Mexico, Canada, and the Pacific Rim, have influenced its history. Throughout, we pay particular attention to the diverse peoples who have called this place home.

We begin in the middle of the nineteenth century, as the United States worked to consolidate its hold over the trans-Mississippi West and the peoples who inhabited it. The processes of consolidation and incorporation will serve as the focus for the first portion of the course. Thereafter, we consider the development of the West as a region and examine the trends and concerns that highlight its distinctiveness from other parts of the country. We conclude with an exploration of contemporary political, economic, and social events in the West and their deep historical roots.

Course Requirements

1. Course Participation – 20%
Students are required to attend all lectures, movie screenings, and weekly discussion sections. In addition, three feature-length films will be screened on three separate evenings throughout the semester. If you cannot attend these screenings, please rent or borrow these films and watch them on your own. You’ll be responsible for the film content in exams and in the web log assignment (see below).

2. Web Log & Film Journal – 15%
Over the course of the semester, we will view six documentary and feature films. You are required to post responses to at least four (4) of the films we watch during the semester to the on-line discussion forum on the History 462 homepage (see instructions below). These entries are meant to provide a forum for discussing your thoughts about the movies or for raising questions about what you’ve seen. You should reflect on the relationship between the films and the other materials you have encountered in course lectures, readings, and discussions. From time to time, you will also be asked to respond to more directed questions. Ideally, your postings will generate ongoing discussions about the films (and the course) as you post your comments and respond to those of your classmates. You should view the
four entries noted above as the minimum contribution and should certainly feel free to post your comments more frequently.

This assignment requires that you monitor the web forum on a regular basis. Your formal postings should be at least 100-200 words in length. These entries need not be polished, but they should pay attention to basic rules of grammar and style. Please avoid abbreviations, symbols, and other web chat conventions.

To access the web forum:
1. From your My UW portal, click on the Academic tab.
2. Under the History 462 course heading, click on the Learn@UW link. If you are unable to locate this link, go to https://uwmadcourses.wisconsin.edu.
3. Enter your net id and password.
4. Click on the link for History 462 and look for the link to the Film Discussion forum.

3. Book Review Assignment – 25% (6-8 pages, typed, double-spaced)
For this paper, you will be asked to write a 6-8 page book review of one of the three single-author books assigned this semester. The goal: to analyze critically the arguments advanced in one of the assigned books and to examine how the historical events described therein continue to affect life in the contemporary U.S. West.

This assignment has three parts:

a. Begin the paper with a 1-2 page summary of the book’s main arguments. You must convey the major arguments of the book and the means by which the author makes them. Be as concise as possible!

In order to help you distil the author’s arguments and to phrase them concisely, you must submit a 50-word summary of the author’s central thesis or argument at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 2. This is also meant to provide you with an opportunity for feedback before you begin the larger assignment. You should take this assignment seriously for it will count toward the overall grade for the book review. Also, be mindful of the word limit – your précis should not exceed 50 words!

b. In the second section, you must critically consider the book’s arguments. Some questions you might consider include: Does the author convincingly argue his/her thesis? Why or why not? What evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does s/he provide adequate supporting evidence? Has the author omitted any important issues or counter-arguments? Why is this important? Which parts of the book do you find most and least persuasive?

c. In the final section, you should consider these arguments in light of mass media reporting of similar or related events within the past decade. Using the on-line periodical indexes available through the E-Resource Gateway on the UW Libraries website (such as LexisNexis, the Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature, or The New York Times), locate an article (or articles) from newspapers or magazines that deal with issues similar to those raised in your monograph. For example, if you choose to review Donald Worster’s Rivers of Empire, you might look for recent news reports that deal with conflicts over water rights in the West (especially those involving communities of color), the growth of agribusiness, or international disputes over access to water. If you are writing on David Montejano’s Anglos and Mexicans, you might look for reports dealing with Mexican migration to the U.S., relations between Anglo-Texans and Mexican Americans, or the on-going struggle for Mexican American civil rights across the West more generally. Think broadly about the potential connections between the monographs and the news items you review. Once you’ve selected your article(s), consider both the continuities and the differences between the press items and the historical
monograph. How well does the newspaper article describe the historical context? How does the analysis presented in the monograph stand up in light of more recent events?

On Wednesday, October 12, we will be joined in class by a librarian from the Wisconsin Historical Society who will help you navigate the university’s on-line resources. Attendance at this session is mandatory.

If you are at all unsure about your selection, please consult with your teaching assistant or the course lecturer as soon as possible. You should plan to meet with one (or both) of us before you begin the assignment. We are here to help you.

Criteria for evaluation:
Structure: Your paper should have a clear, original thesis statement. Each paragraph should advance your argument and the ideas in your paper should flow logically. Your paragraphs should have identifiable topic sentences and each sentence in the paragraph should relate to that topic sentence. You must also address each of the three parts of the assignment outlined above.

Analysis: You should support your thesis with evidence drawn from the monograph and press articles you are analyzing. Your analysis should be clear and logical and should offer insights into the arguments advanced in the monographs and their connections with contemporary events.

Style: Your sentence structure, grammar, spelling, and citations should be excellent. You should avoid the passive voice and any redundant phrases or wordiness. Your paper should also include complete citations for all works cited. For a guide to citations, please consult the course web site.

Originality: Your paper should offer original insights and arguments, especially with regard to the connections you make between the monographs and contemporary western issues. Try to push beyond the lessons you’ve learned from the course lectures, but remember to keep your insights rooted in the evidence you’ve uncovered.

The paper is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, November 23. Late essays will be marked down by at least one-third of a grade, unless other arrangements are made prior to the due date.

4. Exams
Mid-term Exam – 20%
Final Exam – 20%
There will be two take-home essay exams in this course. The midterm questions will be handed out at the end of lecture on Wednesday, October 12. Your responses are due at the beginning of lecture on Monday, October 17. The final exam questions will be handed out Monday, December 12 and your responses are due at 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, December 17. We will not accept late submissions.

Note also that plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Plagiarism involves presenting the words or ideas of another as if they are your own. It is a serious academic offence.
Readings

The following readings are required for all students. They are available for purchase at the University Book Store, and are on reserve at College Library:


There is also a small required course packet available for purchase at Bob's Copy Shop at 37 University Square. Articles from the course packet are also available on electronic reserve.

Recommended text:

This book is not required, but is an unparalleled resource for the study of the U.S. West. It contains a wealth of short essays on a multitude of western themes and issues.
Calendar and Assignments

IMPORTANT: In the following outline, lecture topics are organized into thematic “weeks” that do NOT correspond with ordinary calendar weeks. Typically, these “weeks” begin with Wednesday’s lecture and end with Tuesday’s discussion sections. The parenthetic number refers to the approximate number of pages assigned that week.

Week 1 Course Introduction
Fri. 09/02: The West on the Small Screen: An Introduction
Mon. 09/05: Labor Day – no class


Week 2 The West and Nation
Wed. 09/07: Which Way West?: Making Sense of a Region’s Past
Fri. 09/09: The Conquest and Colonization of the West to 1850
Mon. 09/12: Manifest Destiny? Slavery, Sectionalism, and the West


Week 3 Contesting the Plains
Wed. 09/14: From Civil War to Indian Wars
Fri. 09/16: Westward Expansion, Federal Style
Mon. 09/19: Settlement and Dispossession in the West


Week 4 The West Incorporated
Wed. 09/21: Women, Men, and the Search for Community in the West
Fri. 09/23: Transforming the Land: Ranching, Railroads, and the Rise of the Extractive Economy
Mon. 09/26: Transforming the Land: Agriculture and Agribusiness


Week 5 Politics and Protest in the West
Wed. 09/28: Western Protests: Agrarian
Fri. 09/30: Western Protests: Industrial
Mon. 10/03: Western Reforms and the Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion

Week 6  The Federal Landscape  
Wed. 10/05:  The Federal Landscape: Water, Timber, and Land  
Fri. 10/07:  The Federal Landscape: National Parks and Preservation  
Mon. 10/10:  Evening screening: Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974) – no lecture


Week 7  
Wed. 10/12:  Visit by Nancy Mulhern, Librarian, Wisconsin Historical Society - Mid-term Exam Questions Handed Out  
Fri. 10/14:  no lecture – work on mid-term exams  
Mon. 10/17:  The West in Art and Literature - Mid-term Exams due at beginning of lecture

Readings: -no readings – sections cancelled this week

Week 8  On the Margins  
Wed. 10/19:  Life on the Border  
Fri. 10/21:  The Trans-Pacific West: Asian American Communities in the West  
Mon. 10/24:  Film: Goin’ Back to T-Town


Week 9  Pivotal Decades  
Wed. 10/26:  Dust Bowl Decade: The West and the New Deal  
Fri. 10/28:  World War II and Its Aftermath  
Mon. 10/31:  Film: A Family Gathering


Week 10  Urban and Racial Faultlines  
Wed. 11/02:  Metropolis and Suburb: The Urban West – Précis due at beginning of lecture  
Fri. 11/04:  Film: Forbidden City, USA  
Mon. 11/07:  California Dreams, California Nightmares


Week 11  The Cold War West  
Wed. 11/09:  The Atomic West  
Fri. 11/11:  Boom and Bust: The Postwar Economy  
Mon. 11/14:  Evening screening High Noon (Fred Zinnemann, 1953) – no lecture

Week 12: Real & Imagined Wests
Wed. 11/16: Hollywood's Wild West
Fri. 11/18: Selling the West: Tourism
Mon. 11/21: The Myth of Santa Fe


Week 13: Power and Protest I: The Search for Civil Rights in the West
Wed. 11/23: The Chicana/o Movement – Paper due at beginning of lecture
Fri. 11/25: Thanksgiving Recess – No class
Mon. 11/28: The American Indian Movement


Week 14: Power and Protest II: Protest and Backlash
Wed. 11/30: The Bay Area: From Black Power to Gay Liberation
Fri. 12/02: Environmentalists and Sagebrush Rebels
Mon. 12/05: Sunbelt, USA


Week 15: New West, True West?
Wed. 12/07: Evening screening of Lone Star (John Sayles, 1996) – no lecture
Fri. 12/09: Re-Imagining the West: The North American West in the 21st Century
Mon. 12/12: Course Wrap Up – Take-home Final Exam questions handed out


Week 16
Wed. 12/14: No lecture – work on final exams.
Fri. 12/16: No lecture – work on final exams.

Take-home Final Exams due Saturday, December 17, at 4:00 p.m.

Readings: -no readings; sections cancelled this week.
This America West Timeline lists the critical years of the Western American territory's discovery, colonization, and settlement. The US Government decreed that the Indian tribes could freely inhabit the Great Plains. A Permanent Indian Frontier was established on the eastern edge of the Great Plains. Spring 1837. Cattle ranching had been firmly established in Johnson County since the 1870s and many ranch owners had become wealthy and influential. During the 1880s they wanted more land and tried to buy-out small time ranchers and farmers. Those small-time ranchers and farmers who resisted were accused of cattle-rustling and some were hanged.