



# The Frontier in American Culture

## COURSE GUIDE

History 324w

Fall 2002

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Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 3:15-4:00; and by appointment

### Scope of the Course

This course is not designed to be a history of the American West. Rather it explores the ways that ideas about and experiences of the frontier have shaped American culture from the earliest days of settlement through the mid-twentieth century. Though there will be a good deal of information about the politics of western expansion and the specific settlement history of the West, the course is designed primarily to explore the variety of meanings the frontier has held for different generations of Americans. Thus, in addition to settlers, politicians, and all manner of Indians, you will encounter artists, writers, film makers, and an assortment of pop culture heroes and villains.

### Course Objectives

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- ?? Evaluate historical debates over the role and significance of the frontier in the development of American culture.
- ?? Identify and evaluate key events in the geographic expansion of the American frontier and assess the consequences of expansion for American history.

- ?? Assess the symbolic meanings of the frontier for different generations of Americans.
- ?? Evaluate different types of historical evidence documenting the American frontier including maps, paintings, films, documents, and such popular cultural inventions as the wild west show.
- ?? Practice a variety of writing styles and formats.
- ?? Improve your writing skills by learning to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your own writing through peer evaluation.

## Required Readings

### **Books: (available at UNCG Bookstore)**

- Calloway, Colin G. *New Worlds for All: Indians Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. [E45 .C34 1997]
- Roth, Mitchel. *Reading the American West: Primary Source Readings in American History*. New York: Longman. 1999.

### **Journal Articles and Book Chapters (available in the Reserve Room in Jackson Library and on the web)**

- Altherr, Thomas, "Let 'er Rip: Popular Culture Images of the American West in Wild West Shows, Rodeos, and Rendezvous." In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. pp. 73-105. [ERESERVES and F596W281996]
- Cronon, William. "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change" In *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. [ERESERVES; and N8214.5.U6 D57 1992]
- Flores, Dan. "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 2. (Sep., 1991): pp. 465-485. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR]
- Goetzmann, William H. "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3. (Autumn 1963), pp. 402-415. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR]
- Hight, K. S., "'Doomed to Perish': George Catlin's Depictions of the Mandan." *Art Journal*. Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1990): 119-124. [Use journal finder to look this up online in EBSCOhost]
- Johns, Elizabeth. "From the Outer Verge of Our Civilization." In *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. [ERESERVES and ND1451.5 .J64 1991]
- Kasson, Joy. "American Indian Performers in the Wild West." In *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. [pp. 161-219; GV1821.B8 K37 2000 and ERESERVES]
- Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR]
- Tompkins, Jane. "WEST OF EVERYTHING." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1987 86(4): 357-377. [ERESERVES]

## Evaluation

Participation	10%
Writing Assignments:	
Unit 1	15%
Unit 2	15%
Unit 3	40%
Unit 4	20%

### Attendance Policy

Faithful attendance is essential for your learning in this course. Therefore, beyond the part attendance plays in the overall participation grade, **there will be a 3% reduction of the student's final grade for each absence after the first 3.** Beyond even this penalty, a student who seriously neglects attendance and preparation risks failing the course.

### Participation (10%)

This assessment will be based on three criteria:

1. Consistent **attendance**--This is not a traditional lecture course. We will be critically evaluating the content of the readings and practicing the application of analytical skills during each class period. You will not be able to make up for your absences by copying someone else's notes. For this reason, consistent attendance is essential to your learning in this course. See above for an explanation of the course attendance policy which has an impact on your overall grade in the course beyond its importance for evaluating your participation.
2. Thorough **preparation** for class--readings must be completed before class and assignments must be turned in on time. There will be a penalty for late assignments and no assignments that are more than one week late will be accepted for credit.
3. Regular **contributions to class discussions**--the success of this course for your learning depends on active intellectual engagement with your peers. Discussions will take place during every class meeting in both small group exercises and as a whole class.

### Unit Assignments

This is a writing intensive course, which means that writing instruction will be a significant component of course content. You will practice a wide variety of types of writing; especially the kinds of writing that are integral to the historian's craft. For example, you will learn how to use primary sources as supporting evidence in constructing an argument and you will record your findings in a research exercise. All assignments go beyond rote memorization of course materials to require application, synthesis, critical thinking, and problem solving.

### **Unit 1 (15%)**

Essay: What are the central points of disagreement over the definition of "frontier"? 3-5 pages typed, double-spaced. Due 3 September.

### **Unit 2 (15%)**

Primary Source Analysis: Select **two** different primary sources and explain how each one either supports or contradicts a key argument in Calloway's, *New Worlds for All*. Due 17 September.

### **Unit 3 (40%)**

Research exercise (10%): Use NC newspapers on microfilm in Jackson Library to study backcountry store advertisements before 1840. What kind of stores and goods were available? Does this evidence support Perkins's argument about KY? Due 1 October.

Exhibit Portfolio (30%), Unit 3 focuses on the ways that the frontier has been constructed or interpreted by a wide range of American artists. You will produce a portfolio that evaluates the meaning and significance of selected paintings for understanding the history of the frontier in the antebellum United States. Specific instructions will be provided well in advance of the due date. You will produce drafts of your work and there will be two writing workshop focusing on successful completion of this assignment. Due 12 November.

### **Unit 4 (20%):**

This unit focuses on the development of three new genres of American entertainment that developed largely after the actual frontier experience had ended—the wild west show, the western novel, and film westerns. Evaluate three or four different ways that these new entertainment forms re-interpreted frontier experience for modern American audiences. Be sure to incorporate primary source evidence into your analysis. [About 7 pages, typed, double-spaced, with footnotes/endnotes] Due 5 December.

## **Course Schedule**

**20 August**     Introductions

### **Unit 1: Defining "Frontier"**

Unit 1 Essay: What are the central points of disagreement over the definition of "frontier"? 3-5 pages typed, double-spaced. Due 3 September.
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**22 August**             Frederick Jackson Turner

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

1.1 "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893):3-20.

**27 August**             Walter Prescott Webb

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

1.2 The West of Walter Prescott Webb (1931): 20-24.

**29 August**                      New Western History  
In Roth, *Reading the American West*:  
    1.3 The New Western History (1988): 24-33.  
    12.7 Is there a West? (1920): pp. 285-288.

## **Unit 2: New Worlds for All**

Unit 2 Primary Source Analysis: Select **two** different primary sources and explain how each one either supports or contradicts a key argument in Calloway's, *New Worlds for All*. 3-5 pages typed, double-spaced. Due 17 September.

**3 September**                      Colonial frontier  
Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-67, in Calloway, Colin G. *New Worlds for All*.  
Unit 1 essay due.

**5 September**                      Colonial frontier  
Chapters 4-6, pp. 68-133, in Calloway, Colin G. *New Worlds for All*.

**10 September**                      Colonial frontier  
Chapters 7-Conclusion, pp. 134-198, in Calloway, Colin G. *New Worlds for All*.

**12 September**                      Primary Source workshop  
In Roth, *Reading the American West*:  
    Chapter 2. "A Collision of Worlds," pp. 35-53.

## **Unit 3: Nineteenth Century Myth and Experience**

Research exercise (10%): Use NC newspapers on microfilm in Jackson Library to study backcountry store advertisements before 1840. What kind of stores and goods were available? Does this evidence support Perkins's argument about KY? Due 1 October.

Exhibit Portfolio (30%), Unit 3 focuses on the ways that the frontier has been constructed or interpreted by a wide range of American artists. You will produce a portfolio that evaluates the meaning and significance of selected paintings for understanding the history of the frontier in the antebellum United States. Specific instructions will be provided well in advance of the due date. You will produce drafts of your work and there will be two writing workshop focusing on successful completion of this assignment. Due 12 November.

**17 September**                      Unit 3 Overview/Research workshop  
Unit 2 assignment due.

**19 September** Pioneers

Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR.]

**24 September** Pioneers

Perkins, Elizabeth A. "The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 486-510. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR.]

**26 September** Ideology of Expansion

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

3.4 Opposition to the Louisiana Purchase (1803), pp. 63-65.

3.5 Andrew Jackson, First Annual Message to Congress (1829), pp. 65-66.

6.2 John L. O'Sullivan. "The Great Nation of Futurity," (1845) pp 114-116.

5.3 Slavery in the Western Territories (1850), pp. 96-97.

**1 October** Research reports

Research Exercise due.

**3 October** Mountain Men

Goetzmann, William H. "The Mountain Man as Jacksonian Man." *American Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3. (Autumn 1963), pp. 402-415. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR.]

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

4.5 "Rendezvous and the Rocky Mountain Fur Trade," pp. 79-81.

**8 October** Fur Trappers as a New American Stereotype

Johns, Elizabeth. "From the Outer Verge of Our Civilization." In *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991. [ERESERVES and ND1451.5 .J64 1991]

**10 October** No Class

**15 October** Fall Break (classes dismissed)

**17 October** Indians

Flores, Dan. "Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 2. (Sep., 1991): pp. 465-485. [Use journal finder to look this up online in JSTOR.]

In Roth, Mitchel. *Reading the American West*:

4.6 "Buffalo Hunt" (1832), pp. 81-83.

11.8 The Disappearance of the Buffalo (1893), p. 251.

**22 October** Indians

Hight, K. S., "'Doomed to Perish': George Catlin's Depictions of the Mandan." *Art Journal*. Vol. 49, No. 2 (Summer 1990): 119-124. [Use journal finder to look this up on EBSCOhost]

**24 October** Views of a Vanishing Frontier  
3 caption drafts due.

**29 October** Portfolio workshop: captions

**31 October** Landscapes

Cronon, William. "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change" In *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. [ERESERVES; and N8214.5.U6 D57 1992]

**5 November** Wilderness and the West

Cronon, William. "Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change" In *Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. [ERESERVES; and N8214.5.U6 D57 1992]

**7 November** Portfolio Workshop: Introductions and organization  
Final portfolios due 12 November.

## **Unit 4: Inventing the Wild West: From the Wild West Show to Western Movies**

Unit 4 assignment: This unit focuses on the development of three new genres of American entertainment that developed largely after the actual frontier experience had ended—the wild west show, the western novel, and film westerns. Evaluate three or four different ways that these new entertainment forms re-interpreted frontier experience for a modern American audiences. Be sure to incorporate primary source evidence into your analysis. [about 7 pages, typed, double-spaced, with footnotes/endnotes] Due 5 December.

**12 November** Heroes and outlaws: Celebrity, modernism, and the "wild west"  
Portfolios due.

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

9.3 Wild Bill Hickok (1869), pp. 196-198.

9.4 Billy the Kid (1878), pp. 198-200.

9.6 Teddy Roosevelt, Cowboy (1884), pp. 205-206.

9.8 The Death of Belle Starr, the Bandit Queen (1889), pp. 207-208.

9.9 Nat Love, Alias Deadwood Dick (1907), pp. 208-211.

**14 November**            The Wild West Show

Altherr, Thomas, "Let 'er Rip: Popular Culture Images of the American West in Wild West Shows, Rodeos, and Rendezvous." In *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996. pp. 73-105. [ERESERVES and F596W281996]

**19 November**            The Indians' Wild West

Kasson, Joy. "American Indian Performers in the Wild West." In *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. [pp. 161-219; ERESERVES and GV1821.B8 K37 2000]

**21 November**            The Indians' Wild West

Kasson, Joy. "American Indian Performers in the Wild West." In *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory, and Popular History*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000. [pp. 161-219; ERESERVES and GV1821.B8 K37 2000]

In Roth, *Reading the American West*:

9.5 Interview with Sitting Bull (1881), pp. 200-204.

7.3 The Sand Creek Massacre (1885), pp. 142-148.

7.6 The Death of Sitting Bull (1890), pp. 154-155.

7.7 Wounded Knee (1890), pp. 155-160.

12.5 Geronimo at the World's Fair (1904), pp. 280-282.

**26 November**            Writing the frontier: dime novels and westerns

Tompkins, Jane. "WEST OF EVERYTHING." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1987 86(4): 357-377. [ERESERVES]

**28 November**            Thanksgiving Holiday (classes dismissed)

**3 December**            Hollywood's Frontier

**5 December**            Course evaluations among other things  
Unit 4 assignment due.