

English 254
The American West

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October 1

Introduction

One of the most significant events in the nineteenth century was the expansion of the United States, culminating in the exploration and settlement of the American West. Yet courses on nineteenth-century American literature seldom lend proportionate emphasis to this important political and widespread social phenomenon. This course attempts to correct that mistake by presenting a selection of works which narrate the process of westward migration, native removal and genocide, the exploitation of the region's natural resources, and the transformation of the West from a rural to a predominantly urban environment. Equal weight will be given to canonical writers and to women and people of color whose accounts have been suppressed or neglected in literary studies of the American West. The readings are arranged in chronological order and grouped in relation to historic events, cultural movements, literary genres, and ideological trends.

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)

October 8

Origins and Beginnings

Native American Creation Myths
Excerpts from folk stories

Black California, or The Legend of the Lost Island of Amazons
Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo, *The Labors of the Very Brave Knight Esplandián* (1500)

The Spanish Presence in the Southwest: The Search for the Seven Cities of Cibola
Pedro de Castañeda, *The Journey of Coronado* (1540-42), excerpts

The Great White Hope, or The Mythical Northwest Passage
Thomas Jefferson, Instructions to Lewis and Clark (1803)
Edgar Allan Poe, *The Journal of Julius Rodman*

The Mormons Move West
The Doctrines and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Section 136 (1835)
Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872), chapter 16 and appendix A

The Gold Rush and Chinese Migration
Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes from San Francisco Chinatown, excerpts

October 15
Exploration

Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, *The Journals of Lewis and Clark* (1804-06)

October 22
Captivity Narratives

James Fenimore Cooper, *The Prairie* (1827)

James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824)

October 29
The Black West

James Pierson Beckwourth, *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth* (1856)

November 5
Aesthetic Movements and Anthropological Studies

Francis Parkman, Jr., *The Oregon Trail* (1849)

George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians* (1841), chapter 1

Mark Twain, *Roughing It*, chapter 19

November 12
Indian Removal and Mexican Conquest

Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona* (1884)

Helen Hunt Jackson, *A Century of Dishonor* (1881), chapter 1

John L. O'Sullivan, "Manifest Destiny," *Democratic Review* (1845)

"Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo" (1848)

November 19
The Gold Rush

Louise Clappe, *The Shirley Letters, from the California Mines* (1854-55)

John Rollin Ridge ("Yellow Bird"), *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854)

November 26
The City

Frank Norris, *McTeague* (1899)

December 3

Endings

Settlement and the Census

Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)

The Wild West Show as Artifact and Commodity

Richard White, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill"

Women and Civilization

Bret Harte, "The Luck of Roaring Camp" (1868)

Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (1898)

Cowboy Poetry, or Nostalgic Laments

"The Cowboy's Dream," "The Dying Cowboy," "The Last Longhorn," "The Great Round-up," "Rounded Up in Glory," "The Cowboy's Lament"



Two volumes of xeroxed materials are available, along with the rest of the books in the course, at ASUCLA. Volume one reproduces *The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth*, which is out of print. Volume two includes most of the short selections and excerpts listed on the syllabus. The essays by Frederick Jackson Turner and Richard White are on reserve at the Young Research Library.

Your grade will be based on weekly attendance and participation in seminar and on a research paper due at the end of the term.

Office hours are Mondays 2:00-4:00 and Wednesdays 11:00-12:00 in Rolfe 1314. You may also phone me at home (323-938-0998) or email me at: allmendi@humnet.ucla.edu.

Secondary Readings: Frederick Jackson Turner

Turner's essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), remains the most influential and provocative contribution to scholarship on the American West. In the 110 years since the essay was published, it has attracted both supporters and critics.

Early supporters of the Turnerian viewpoint include Ray Allen Billington, Martin Ridge, Walter Prescott Webb, and Henry Nash Smith. In *America's Frontier Heritage* (1966), Billington defends Turner's claim that the frontier had an impact on the American character, the development of democracy, and national migration patterns. In *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise* (1981), he explores another one of Turner's ideas—that the frontier was central to the European conception of the United States, as well as crucial to America's sense of itself. The textbook *Westward Expansion* (5th rev. ed., 1982), edited by Billington and Martin Ridge, is aimed at students, not scholars. For generations, it has introduced Turner's ideas into the classroom, thus helping to perpetuate Turner's continuing legacy.

Walter Prescott Webb's two most famous works are *The Great Plains* (1932) and *The Texas Rangers* (1935). Webb is more specific than Turner in defining the West as a specific geographical region—in this case, the Great Plains—but he shares with Turner certain racial prejudices. *The Texas Rangers* is a tribute to white law enforcers who rid the Southwest of Mexicans. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), Henry Nash Smith's classic study, is regarded as the first work in the field of American Studies. Smith looks at popular culture, historiography, and canonical American literature in support of his thesis that the West is a symbol of economic opportunity and mythic rebirth.

More recently, critics have challenged Turner's frontier hypothesis. These critics, known as the New Western Historians, contend that American history is not a triumphal narrative of exploration, conquest, and settlement, but a shameful account of imperialism, racism, sexism, genocide, and environmental destruction. While Turner celebrates the roles played by white men (scouts, army generals, ranchers, miners, et al.), these scholars focus on neglected (and often victimized) women and people of color. They consider the environmental consequences and the negative social and political aspects of westward expansion. The most important intellectual figures in this movement are: 1) Patricia Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (1985); 2) Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (1991); and William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (1991). See also, Limerick, "Turnerians All: The Dream of a Helpful History in an Intelligible World," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 697-716; and Limerick, Clyde Milner II, and Charles Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (1991).

To some extent literary critics concur with New Western Historians and to some extent they take issue with historians in their readings of western American literature. For a complex set of responses to the American West, from the

perspectives of literary critics and western historians, see Forest G. Robinson, ed., *The New Western History: The Territory Ahead* (1998). For an intellectual history of the American West, which includes readings of Turner and other critics in the fields of history, anthropology, and ethnic studies, see Kerwin Lee Klein, *Frontiers of Historical Imagination: Narrating the European Conquest of Native America, 1890-1990* (1997). For a reading of Turner's essay which discusses its rhetorical devices and literary influences, see William R. Handley, *Marriage, Violence, and the Nation in the American Literary West* (2002), chapter 2.

Week 2 Discussion Questions

On Native American Folk Stories:

These creation stories cannot be considered “pure” or “authentic” Native American narratives. They were documented, translated, and edited by white anthropologists. To what extent do these stories maintain a connection to the oral tradition, relying on formulaic phrases, other mnemonic devices, and “primitive” storytelling characteristics? To what extent do they seem to manifest literary qualities?

Various tribes had already had contact with European explorers and American settlers before anthropologists visited Native Americans in the late nineteenth century. Some tribes incorporated stories from the Bible into their narratives as a result of this cultural interaction and (partial) Christian conversion. Can you identify biblical echoes in any of these Native American stories?

On the Mythical California Island of Amazons:

This account of a tribe of Amazonian women shares some similarities with the stories of Native American tribes. In both cases, myth is presented as history. The West is described as an exceptional place, populated by a pure race or a single gender of people. These pagans come into contact with Christian outsiders or foes. What is the significance of these similarities? What are some of the differences?

On the Journey of Coronado:

This narrative juxtaposes the myth of the Seven Cities of Cibola with the unpleasant reality: no gold or silver; a harsh southwestern climate and hostile terrain; gullible, ignorant, and arrogant European explorers; dangerous, resistant, and untrustworthy natives; and plain ole bad luck. In what way does the narrative derive its literary momentum and didactic value from such juxtapositions?

In the preface, the author suggests that although the expedition was a failure, many important lessons were learned. What is the value of exploration? From the perspective of the historian, what good is history?

Consider the interracial relations among Spaniards, blacks, and Native Americans. To what extent is the black Stephen an intermediary between white Europeans and Indians? How do his motives differ from those of the Spaniards? What kind of mistakes or confusions result because of racial suspicions and cultural or linguistic misunderstandings?

To what extent are the interests of Church and State intertwined? What role do the Franciscan friars play in promoting European empire?

On U.S. Exploration:

How does Thomas Jefferson imagine the nation's topography? What does he believe Lewis and Clark will discover? To what extent does landscape reveal God's providential design? How will exploration further U.S. economic, political, and intellectual purposes? What does Jefferson mean when he says that Lewis and Clark's expedition is a "literary" enterprise?

The Journal of Julius Rodman is a *faux* exploration narrative: an imitation, a critique, and a parody. To what extent does Poe strive for authenticity in his presentation? What is the role of the introducer and editor? Is he in sympathy with or at odds with the author? Why does Julius Rodman leave civilization and enter the wilderness? Is he interested in serving the nation as an explorer, like Lewis and Clark, or does he have personal motives for behaving the way that he does? What do we make of his dark side—his occasional bouts with depression? Why does the journal end where it does?

On the Mormons:

Consider: 1) the Mormon migration both as an exile and as an exodus; as a forward westward movement and as a retreat from civilization; 2) the representation of white Mormons (rather than Indians) as a persecuted minority; and 3) the collusion between Church and State in the foundation of Mormonism as a parallel with the relationship between Church and State in the case of New Spain.

Among other things, Mark Twain claims that the Book of Mormon is really bad literature. Do you find any support for his claim in the excerpt from *Doctrines and Covenants*?

To what extent is Twain a critic of Mormons? To what extent is he an admirer, a defender, an apologist, or an amateur anthropologist allowing readers a glimpse into another society?

On Asian Migration:

How does the Chinese search for "Gold Mountain" compare with the Spanish expedition for the Seven Cities of Cibola or the U.S. gold rush? How is the West as a region mythologized and commodified? What expectations do different groups of immigrants have? Nineteenth-century Chinese-American immigrants were known as industrious laborers who worked as servants, started small business, and contributed to the creation of the transcontinental railroad. Yet in these songs it is luck rather than hard work that they celebrate. Why?

Week 3 Discussion Questions

Lewis and Clark are always referred to as an inseparable duo. Their journals have been combined and published as one. Yet the explorers had different tasks to perform during the expedition, different interests, different degrees of education and different abilities, as well as different personalities, as the journals reveal. What are the advantages of reading the journals as one narrative? To what extent do they comment on each other, complement each other, or contribute to providing a complete account of the journey? Why is it necessary to remember the differences between the men and their discrepant accounts?

Lewis's entries are usually considered more valuable from a literary standpoint. The more educated member of the duo writes better and addresses aesthetic and philosophical issues. Notice passages in his writing where nature appears transcendental, picturesque, or sublime. How does Lewis's felicitous prose style seem to smooth out difficulties found in nature; how does it filter his and the reader's perception of nature?

Clark offers useful factual information, but his entries are poorly written—full of misspellings, incomplete sentences, and orthographic gaps in the text. Still, could one argue that Clark's writings are in some ways more interesting than Lewis's, in that they reflect the roughness, imperfection, and certain unsatisfying aspects of the journey itself?

At times Lewis seems optimistic and ecstatic, at other times brooding and melancholy. Could Edgar Allan Poe have used Lewis as a model for Julius Rodman? If so, what meaning does Poe find in the explorer's erratic moods and behavior?

What do we learn about Indians from Lewis and Clark? Are the men—together or separately—more culturally biased or more sensitive than you might have expected? To what extent do they attempt to impress the sovereignty of the United States on various tribes? Is it fair to say that the men have selfish economic and political motives, and certain racial and cultural biases, but at the same time some scientific professionalism or objective neutrality?

Thomas Jefferson described the journey as a "literary pursuit." Lewis later identified Jefferson as "*the author of our enterpriz.*" Are the *Journals of Lewis and Clark* literature, cultural anthropology, or history?

How does the return trip differ from the journey out? Are Lewis and Clark disillusioned once they realize that there is no Northwest Passage? Do they notice different things, or write in a different tone, on the way back? Is the expedition still valuable even though Lewis and Clark have failed in their original mission? Why or why not?

Secondary Readings: Cooper and Jemison

The criticism on Cooper's body of work, like Natty's body at the end of *The Prairie*, is old and not that impressive. Some early scholarship is still worth reading, however, including Henry Nash Smith's chapter on the Leatherstocking Tales in *Virgin Land* (1950) and R.W.B. Lewis's discussion of Cooper's protagonist in *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955). Stephen Railton's *Fenimore Cooper: A Study of His Life and Imagination* (1978) is the standard critical biography.

There is less scholarship on *The Prairie* than there is on other novels in the Leatherstocking series. (Early reviewers agreed that *The Prairie* was weaker than previous installments in the series, *The Pioneers* and *The Last of the Mohicans*, and most critics today seem to agree.) Francis Parkman praised Cooper's works in an article in *North American Review* (January 1852). But Bret Harte ridiculed the author, publishing a Cooperesque parody, "Muck-A-Muck: A Modern Indian Novel," in 1867. And Mark Twain famously criticized Cooper in "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," published in 1895.

For a discussion of Elizabethan, Romantic, and Gothic influences in *The Prairie*, especially in terms of the relationship between landscape and painting, see Blake Nevius, *Cooper's Landscapes: An Essay on the Picturesque Vision* (1976); Donald Ringe, *The Pictorial Mode* (1962); H. Daniel Peck, *A World By Itself: The Pastoral Moment in Cooper's Fiction* (1977); and Joann Peck Krieg, "The Transmorgification of Faerie Land Into Prairie Land," *Journal of American Studies* 19 (August 1985): 200-223. Other useful studies include Gordon Brotherston, "The Prairie and Cooper's Invention of the West," in Robert Clark, ed., *James Fenimore Cooper: New Critical Essays* (1985); and Orm Overland, *The Making and Meaning of an American Classic: James Fenimore Cooper's "The Prairie"* (1973), which considers the sources Cooper used, the first draft of the novel versus later revisions, and critical approaches as well. For valuable insights into Cooper's Leatherstocking Novels, focusing on other works in the series, see Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860* (1985), Chapter 4, which provides a reading of *The Last of the Mohicans*; and Philip Fisher, *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (1987), Chapter 1, which analyzes *The Deerslayer*.

More interesting work has been done on *The Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. Begin with Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significance of Captivity Narratives," *American Literature* 19 (1947). Then look at the standard work on Indian captivity narratives: Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (1973), which includes a discussion of Jemison. So does *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (1984), by Annette Kolodny. More recently: June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (1993); Ezra F. Tawil, "Domestic Frontier Romance, or, How the Sentimental Heroine Became White," *Novel* 32 (Fall 1998): 99-124; Evelyne Keitel, "Captivity Narratives and the Powers of Horror," in Kevin L. Cope, ed., *1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* (2000); and Michelle Burnham, "'However Extravagant the Pretension': Bivocalism and US Nation-Building in A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23 (2001): 325-47.

Secondary Readings: Lewis and Clark

Allen, John L. *Passage Through the Garden: Lewis and Clark and the Image of the American Northwest*. 1975.

Ambrose, Stephen E. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. 1996.

Biddle, Nicholas, ed. *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark*. 2 vols. 1814.

Burroughs, Raymond Darwin. *The Natural History of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. 1961.

Coues, Elliott, ed. *History of the Expedition under the Command of Lewis and Clark*. 4 vols. 1893.

Cutright, Paul Russell. *Lewis and Clark: Pioneering Naturalists*. 1969.
----- *A History of the Lewis and Clark Journals*. 1976.

Fresonke, Kris. *West of Emerson: The Design of Manifest Destiny*. 2003. Chapter 1.

Goetzmann, William H. *New Lands, New Men: America and the Second Great Age of Discovery*. 1986.

Greenfield, Bruce. *Narrating Discovery: The Romantic Explorer in American Literature, 1790-1855*. 1992. Chapter 2.

Jackson, Donald, ed. *Letters of the Lewis and Clark Expedition with Related Documents, 1783-1854*. 1978.

Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on Virginia*.

Rhonda, James P. *Lewis and Clark among the Indians*. 1984.

Seelye, John. *Beautiful Machine: Rivers and the Republican Plan, 1755-1825*. 1977. Chapter 8.

Thwaites, Reuben Gold, ed. *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. 8 vols. 1904-05.

Ziff, Larzer. *Writing in the New Nation*. 1991. Chapter 8.

Week 4 Discussion Questions

On Cooper:

It has been said that in the character of Natty Bumppo, Cooper combined the best aspects of “civilization” and “savagery.” Consider the hero as an intermediary between white factions and Indians; as an untutored yet intelligent man with philosophical thoughts and rhetorical skills; as someone who speaks several languages, and whose English merges high and low dialects. Natty was born in civilization, yet he prefers to live in the wilderness. What are his unorthodox views on religion, government, Native Americans, violence, westward expansion, and private or personal property?

In *The Prairie*, the hero is an elderly figure, unable to perform heroic physical feats. His decline and death are recounted in dramatic detail. Does Natty’s death coincide with the closing of the U.S. frontier? To what extent does the novel reflect a Turnerian view? Why does Natty’s move to the prairie feel like a retreat or defeat, not like a positive step? Is the landscape or the region romanticized, or is it portrayed as hellish and bleak? In what way is Natty heroic, given that he is unable to perform the exploits of a much younger man?

Being kidnapped and held captive, then being rescued or released, constitutes a major part of the plot in *The Prairie*. Why do Ishmael and his clan kidnap Inez? Why do they take her out West? Why do they return to where they came from at the end of the novel? Are the degenerate white immigrants compared to certain “savage” Indian tribes? To what extent do the whites and the Indians play different or similar roles in the novel?

How do the romantic subplots—involving Middleton and Inez, and Paul and Ellen—reflect larger political themes? The marriage between an American and an inhabitant of the Louisiana Territory coincides with the acquisition of new land by the nation. At the same time that geopolitical borders are erased by romantic alliances, certain divisions, based on race and class, remain firmly in place. How do the marriages between the upper-class Middleton and Inez, and the middle-class Paul and Ellen, reinforce traditional social distinctions? To what extent are cultural and racial mixing allowed? Consider the way in which Cooper gives in to convention while at the same time allowing his hero to cross categories and to exhibit a certain freedom and independence from contemporary constraints that other characters lack.

On Captivity Narratives:

Mrs. Jemison’s narrative was published within three years of *The Prairie*. It also distinguishes between the realms of “civilization” and “savagery,” sometimes in unpredictable ways. To what extent does Mrs. Jemison (or the editor) confess an admiration for Indian life? Why is she reluctant to return to society? What shreds of “civilization” cling to her while she lives in the tribe; what habits and memories fade over time?

Where in the text do you suspect that editorial revisions, organizations of material, allusions, and interpretations were added? Does Seaver reveal an ambivalence toward the material? Does he ever seem at odds with the narrative?

Does Mrs. Jemison consider her later life a captivity? What forces her to stay in the tribe? In what way does the narrative comment on relations between nations and tribes?

Week 5 Discussion Questions

The Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth is one of the first books to chronicle the experiences of blacks in the West. At the time the book was published in 1856, and prior to that, when the action takes place, there were very few blacks in the region. The autobiography asks: what does it mean to be black at a time, in a place, where blacks were scarce and even the concept of blackness was foreign? Consider the problem of self-representation, and the relation between region and race, in Beckwourth's autobiography.

Although Beckwourth doesn't actually claim he is white in the autobiography, he hints that he is. Where in the text does he identify as an American, as a citizen with full and equal rights (not as an ex-slave), as a respected companion of the white expedition, as a "hero" according to western mythology? Are there traces which lead us in the text back to Beckwourth's real racial origins, or to his roots in oppression?

In addition to passing as white to the reader, Beckwourth passes as Indian during the years that he lives with the Crow. He lets the reader in on the joke when he passes as Indian, but fools the reader when he passes as white. How does this complicate the autobiography?

Compare passing and westward migration. Is it easier to pass (or to reconstruct one's identity) in the wilderness than it is in society? Does Beckwourth become "savage" when he enters the wilderness and lives with the Crow? Does he become an agent of civilization when he works for the fur-trading companies and represents himself as a (white) man? Both passing and westward migration imply movement of some kind as well as a change of identity.

During the years that Beckwourth lived with the Crow, he performed various services which led to his being rewarded by the tribe with a series of ceremonial names, each one of which enhanced his tribal position and Indian/"ethnic" identity. Consider these episodes as examples of the way in which the autobiography explores identity as social construction. To what extent does passing or race-changing parallel the hierarchical social moves that Beckwourth makes within his tribal community?

Remember that the fur-trading industry was based on a barter economy in which dissimilar items (beaver pelts, buffalo hides, glass trinkets, money, ammunition, alcohol, and necessary supplies) were equated, traded, or sold. How does a barter economy reinforce cultural relativism by rejecting the notion of absolute value and relying on strategies of negotiation or concepts of fluctuating, relative worth?

Although the editor claims in the preface that he transcribed Beckwourth's dictations verbatim, it seems likely that he revised, arranged, and commented on much of the narrative. Where do you suspect that such interpolations took place? Can we see this as an African American text, as a collaboration between the races, or as an example of white cooptation?

Secondary Reading: The Black West

In recent decades, scholars have paid more attention to the presence of racial and ethnic minorities in the American West. Chicano/as, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have become increasingly popular and intellectually important subjects for study. However, African Americans remain nearly invisible. There are only a few standard works on blacks in the West.

The indispensable work is Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (1998). The book is a wide-ranging historical survey, but it offers little analysis of popular culture or literature. Also useful are William Loren Katz, *The Black West* (1996 rev. ed.); Kenneth Wiggins Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (1971); Bruce Glasrud, comp., *African Americans in the West: A Bibliography of Secondary Sources* (1998); Roger D. Hardway, "The African American Frontier: A Bibliographic Essay," in Monroe Lee Billington and Roger D. Harway, eds., *African Americans on the Western Frontier* (1998); and Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (1998).

The scholarship on Beckwourth is even scantier. Most recently, see Noreen Groover Lape, *West of the Border: The Multicultural Literature of the Western American Frontiers* (2000), chapter 1, which considers the "double consciousness" in Beckwourth's autobiography. For early biographical portraits of Beckwourth, and commentary on *The Life and Adventures*, see Elinor Wilson, *Jim Beckwourth: Black Mountain Man and War Chief of the Crows* (1972); LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *Trappers of the Far West: Sixteen Biographical Sketches* (1983); Nolie Mumey, *James Pierson Beckwourth, 1856-1866: An Enigmatic Figure of the West* (1957); Sean Dolan, *James Beckwourth* (1992); Raymond Friday Locke, *James Beckwourth: Mountain Man* (1995); and Bernard DeVoto's introduction to the 1931 edition of *The Life and Adventures*. Francis Parkman attacks Beckwourth's credibility, as well as his race, in *The Oregon Trail* (1849; Penguin reprint, p. 178); and Dame Shirley alludes to him in *The Shirley Letters* (1854-55), vol. 1.

For general information about the fur trade, mountain men, and the Crow tribe, see DeVoto, *Across the Wide Missouri* (1947); Richard C. Poulsen, *The Mountain Man Vernacular: Its Historical Roots, Its Linguistic Nature, and Its Literary Uses* (1985); Ray Allen Billington, *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860*; Hiram Martin Chittenden, *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (1902); and Robert H. Lowie, *The Crow Indians* (1935).

Week 6 Discussion Questions

In *The Oregon Trail*, Parkman appears as a tourist and cultural anthropologist. How does he distinguish himself from emigrants who are entering the West out of necessity? Where are his class and social biases obvious? How does a leisure mentality affect how he organizes activities and processes experience?

Identify passages where Parkman views nature and its inhabitants aesthetically. When does Parkman deploy terms such as beautiful, picturesque, and sublime? To what extent does he compare New World and Old World, the frontier and ancient civilizations? Do such comparisons ennoble the West or make it appear in a less favorable light? Notice also the associations between the West and New England. What triggers these associations? Are they critical or favorable?

In the nineteenth century, the frontier was a testing ground for men who needed to prove their virility. Men who were not in good health, such as Owen Wister and Richard Henry Dana, or men who wanted to participate in “the strenuous life,” such as Theodore Roosevelt, came West to engage in military, adventurous, or athletic activities. How is masculinity defined in *The Oregon Trail*? When does Parkman attempt to prove himself as a man during his trip? Is there an “ideal” specimen of manhood among the men whom Parkman meets? What is the difference between “natural” man and “civilized” man? Do the Indian braves have any or all of the qualities that Parkman admires?

Parkman had poor eyesight, suffered from dysentery, and had numerous ailments during his travels. Does his suffering make him seem more or less manly; heroic? Consider his imperfect vision in relation to the theme of perception. Things which appear to be one thing on the distant horizon turn out to be something else on closer inspection. Does the reality of the nearsighted vision contradict the romance of the far-sighted vision?

Parkman’s attitudes toward the Indians are rather complex. What does he admire about Indians and what does he criticize? What are his cultural biases? What are his criteria for praising the Indians? Is Parkman trying to capture the Indians in print the way that Catlin does in his painting? On the subject of Indians, where does Parkman stand in relation to Lewis and Clark, Cooper, and Twain?

In his introductory chapter from *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, notice that Catlin admires his subjects while at the same time taking it for granted that the Indians are a race on the verge of becoming extinct. How does his portraiture “capture” the Indians for the sake of posterity?

Suggestions for Further Reading on Beckwourth

On Blacks in the West:

Katz, William Loren. *The Black West*
Porter, Kenneth Wiggins Porter. *The Negro on the American Frontier*
Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of the Racial Frontier*

On Mulattoes:

Reuter, Edward Byron. *The Mulatto in the United States, Including a Study of the Role of Mixed-Blood Races throughout the World*
Sollors, Werner. *Neither Black nor White yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*

On Passing:

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*
Ginsberg, Elaine, ed. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*
Kiwash, Samira. *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature*
Lott, Eric. *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*
Mullen, Harryette. "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness," *diacritics* 24 (summer-fall 1994)

On Beckwourth:

Dodds, Gordon B. "Jim [James Pierson] Beckwourth," in Howard R. Lamar, ed., *The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West*
Dolan, Sean. *James Beckwourth*
Locke, Raymond Friday. *James Beckwourth: Mountain Man*
Mumey, Nolie. *James Pierson Beckwourth, 1856-1866: An Enigmatic Figure of the West*
Oswald, Delmont R. "James P. Beckwourth," in LeRoy Hafen, ed., *Trappers of the Far West*
Wilson, Elinor. *Jim Beckwourth: Black Mountain Man and War Chief of the Crows*

On Mountain Men:

Poulsen, Richard C. *The Mountain Man Vernacular: Its Historical Roots, Its Linguistic Nature, and Its Literary Uses*
Walker, Don D. "The Mountain Man as Literary Hero," *Western American Literature* 1 (Spring 1966)

Week 7
Discussion Questions

Does *Ramona* succeed in calling attention to the plight of Native Americans? Do the romance and sentimentality dramatize or diminish this theme?

Jackson blames whites for the problems afflicting the Indians. Why doesn't she also blame the Spaniards and Mexicans, who were present in California long before whites? Why are the Mexicans, like the Indians, depicted as victims of change in the mid-nineteenth century?

Jackson allegorizes the landscape in various scenes. Consider: 1) the cultivated edenic setting at the Moreno estate; 2) the wild habitations where the lovers reside when they leave the estate; and 3) the association of Ramona with nature in general.

Consider the significance of the supporting characters. What makes Senora Moreno a despicable villain? To what extent does she flout—and to what extent does Ramona obey—the sentimental ideals of nineteenth-century womanhood? Do Alessandro and Felipe have a homoerotic relationship? How does it compare with the relationship between Ramona and Alessandro? Is it also unorthodox or conventional according to the sentimental tradition? Why are the Hyers introduced in the second half of the novel? Why are they "good" white people as opposed to other white immigrants flooding into the region?

Jackson portrays Catholicism in a mostly positive light, which is remarkable when one considers that she was a Protestant who was writing during a period of anti-Catholic prejudice. What are the virtues of Catholicism? Is it synonymous with Christianity in general, to the extent that it serves as a civilizing influence? Where do you detect, in spite of Catholicism's favorable representation, traces of prejudice?

What are the virtues of "Indianness" and the virtues of "civilization"? To what extent is Alessandro, the acculturated native, a mix of the two? To what extent is the half-breed Ramona? How do we read the end of the novel? Is it a tragedy, a happy ending, or some kind of compromise?

In *A Century of Dishonor*, Jackson presents a history of abuses against Native Americans which is more fact-based than the novel *Ramona*. Yet even here, at times, she appeals to sentiment rather than reason in stating her case. Where in this work do you see signs of her later technique?

Compare Jackson's novel and O'Sullivan's editorial in the *Democratic Review* in terms of the following: 1) how do both writers appeal to the reader on an emotional level in order to motivate political change; and 2) what is the relation between race and Manifest Destiny?

Secondary Reading: Helen Hunt Jackson

Ramona has been the subject of much recent critical scrutiny. In *City of Quartz* (Chapter One), historian Mike Davis explains the "Mission Myth" and the role that *Ramona* has played in romanticizing Anglo California. While Davis is critical of the novel, historian Kevin Starr is more complementary. See *Inventing the Dream: California through the Progressive Era* (Chapter Two).

Scholars often compare and contrast *Ramona* with *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), a novel by the Mexican-American author María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, published one year after *Ramona*. Both novels portray the Mexican aristocracy favorably and both condemn the United States' political treatment of the Mexican gentry in California following the Mexican-American War. However, Jackson focuses on the mistreatment of Native Americans, whereas Burton cares mostly about the injustices inflicted on Mexicans. See Anne E. Goldman, "'I Think Our Romance Is Spoiled,' or, Crossing Genres: California History in Jackson and Burton," in Valerie J. Matsumoto and Blake Allmendinger, eds., *Over the Edge: Remapping the American West* (1998); Jesse Alemán, "Historical Amnesia and the Vanishing Mestiza: The Problem of Race in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," *Aztlán* 27 (Spring 2000); and David Luis-Brown, "'White Slaves' and the 'Arrogant Mestiza': Reconfiguring Whiteness in *The Squatter and the Don* and *Ramona*," *American Literature* 69 (December 1997).

A number of recent articles consider the implications of Jackson's racial politics. The most interesting of these is Susan Gillman's "*Ramona* in 'Our America,'" in Jeffrey Belnap and Raul Fernandez, eds., *José Martí's "Our America": From National to Hemisphere Cultural Studies* (1998). Gillman writes about José Martí's appropriation of *Ramona* as a symbol of *mestizaje* or race-mixing who has positive meaning for Latinos and Cubans. Gillman and Martí also emphasize the alignment between Jackson and Harriet Beecher Stowe and the relationship between Indians and Negroes in America in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Bryan Wagner argues that Jackson's use of "local color" to describe the Mission period is the same as that used by Southern writers who idealized the plantation system, in "Helen Hunt Jackson's Errant Local Color," *Arizona Quarterly* 58 (Winter 2002). Michele Moylan examines the different editions of *Ramona*, its advertisements and illustrations, film versions, and related forms of publicity for the novel in "Materiality as Performance: The Forming of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*," in Moylan, ed., *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America* (1996). Also worth reading is Martin Padgett, "Travel Writing, Sentimental Romance, and Indian Rights Advocacy: The Politics of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*," *Journal of the Southwest* 42 (Winter 2000).

Week 8
Discussion Questions

On *The Shirley Letters*:

The Shirley Letters is considered the best first-hand account of mining life in the mid-nineteenth century. Consider the following:

- To what extent does the book offer a realistic portrayal of mining life?
- To what extent does it offer a romanticized view?
- Is the author's representation of Indians different from that of other white writers or not?
- Is this a "woman's" work? Is the author's gender in any way relevant?
- Does the author (nicknamed "Dame Shirley") make classist or prejudicial social distinctions?
- What is the relationship between mining and the environment?
- Comment on the work as an epistolary narrative; consider the role of the sister as narratee or letter-recipient.
- How does the author use humor?

On *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*:

Humanities Computing Facility

Comment:

The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta is the first novel written by a Native American. However, John Rollin Ridge ("Yellow Bird") was half white as well as half Cherokee. Although he was born on a reservation, he was raised and educated in mainstream society. To what extent does he celebrate Joaquín Murieta as a symbol for persecuted racial minorities and to what extent does he demonize Murieta as a threat to society? Consider the differences between Murieta and Three Fingered Jack; the reasons given for Murieta's vengeful behavior; the conflicting descriptions of Murieta by the narrator; the shifts in tone in the narrative; the way Murieta moves back and forth between the world of the outlaw and civilization; and the use of disguises.

In addition, consider some of the larger claims made by the author. In the beginning, Ridge claims that his work isn't sensational literature. Instead he says that it presents a realistic account of the social conditions that existed in California at the time. Is this true? If so, how? Also, what do you make of the moral at the end of the book?

Why is the poem "Mount Shasta" inserted into the narrative?

What attitudes are expressed in the work concerning the Indians? What is Murieta's experience with them? Why are they sometimes portrayed sympathetically? Why aren't they always portrayed sympathetically, given the fact that Ridge himself was part Indian? How are other racial minorities, such as the Chinese, depicted?

Suggested Reading

On John Rollin Ridge and "Dame Shirley":

Allmendinger, Blake. *Ten Most Wanted: The New Western Literature* (Ch.2 on Ridge)

Christensen, Peter G. "Minority Interaction in John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta*," *MELUS* 17 (1991-12)

Hobsbawn, Eric. *Bandits*

Krupat, Arnold. *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography*

Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts*

Nadeau, Remi. *The Real Joaquín Murieta: California's Gold Rush Bandit: Truth vs. Myth*

Neruda, Pablo. *Splendor and Death of Joaquín Murieta*

Owen, Louis. *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel*

Parins, James W. *John Rollin Ridge: His Life and Works*

Paul, Rodman Wilson. "In Search of 'Dame Shirley'," *Pacific Historical Review* 33 (1964)

Streeby, Shelley. *American Sensation: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*, Chapter 9

On the Gold Rush:

Borthwick, J.D. *The Gold Hunters: A First-Hand Picture of Life in California Mining Camps in the Early 1850s*

Farnham, Eliza W. *California In-Doors and Out, or, How We Farm, Mine, and Live in the Golden State*

Jackson, Joseph Henry. *Anybody's Gold: The Story of California's Mining Towns*

Johnson, Susan Lee. *Roaring Camp: Social Life During the California Gold Rush*

Lapp, Rudolph M. *Blacks in Gold Rush California*

Paul, Rodman Wilson. *California Gold: The Beginning of Mining in the Far West*

Shinn, Charles Howard. *Mining Camps: A Study in American Frontier Government*

Starr, Kevin. *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915*

Week 10 (Yee-hah!)

Discussion Questions

How does Frederick Jackson Turner define a frontier? Does his definition seem arbitrary? Is Turner's frontier a "place" or a "process"? In what way is the frontier related to certain uniquely American beliefs, behaviors, and systems of government? Is Turner's view of history linear or cyclical? Is the West settled primarily by violent or by non-violent means? To what extent can his essay be read as literature or as a rhetorical exercise? What kind of language, images, and tropes does he employ in his argument? Does he appeal more to empirical reason or to other persuasive means? Where does the "frontier" go once the wilderness disappears?

To what extent did the Wild West shows disseminate and perpetuate the "frontier" as it traveled the nation at the turn of the century? How did these exhibitions raise questions about commodification and spectacle? Did they reinforce cultural stereotypes and extend imperialism via performance?

The appearance of women in the West is often made to coincide with the disappearance of wilderness and the evolution of civilization. To what extent do the stories by Stephen Crane and Bret Harte bear out this assumption? Do the stories reflect nostalgia for an earlier time, a preference for civilization, or a certain ambivalence? Does it matter that both of these stories have strong comic elements? Can we talk about the early West as a "homosocial" society made up of men? What are the implications when women enter the picture?

The cowboy poems (which were first composed orally) can be sung or read as laments mourning the passing of the cowboy, who stands for an earlier frontier and an earlier spirit or way of life. What roles are played by death and the afterlife? Looking at the poems' semiotics, consider the way in which certain signs, such as brands, become reinvented as evidence of Christian salvation. How does the cowboy (re)present himself as an important and tragic figure rather than as an expendable, and almost anachronistic, manual laborer?

