

University of Nevada, Reno
Spring 2007

English 429C.001/629C.001--Literature of the American West
Theme: The Multiethnic West
MW 2:30-3:45, FH 207

Professor: Cheryll Glotfelty
Office: FH 028; w 682-6395; h 425-1993 (please call before 9 p.m.)
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Office Hours: MW 4-5, and by appointment

Introduction

New western historians urge us to understand the American West not as a frontier into which civilization advanced, but as a place--a contact zone--where ethnic groups met and often clashed. This course examines texts that explore themes of cultural contact and conflict among groups that comprise a multiethnic West. We'll use Patricia Limerick's influential history *The Legacy of Conquest* to raise questions that will guide our analysis of literary works and films that represent a contested West.

Goals

- to challenge the "cowboys & Indians" myth of the West with more complex and diverse stories
- to understand how New Western History revises "old" western history
- to read Western American literature through the lens of New Western History
- to employ cultural studies categories of race, class, and gender to analyze literature
- to examine how authors portray cultural conflict when writing about the American West
- to sharpen close reading and critical thinking and writing skills
- to analyze critical discourse about specific literary works
- to perfect the art of intelligent "book talk"
- to kindle a life-long interest in the American West and its literature

Texts

T. C. Boyle, *Tortilla Curtain*
Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims*
Helen Hunt Jackson, *Ramona*
Maxine Hong Kingston, *China Men*
Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*
Thomas Sanchez, *Rabbit Boss*

Films

The Covered Wagon (1923)
Lone Star (1996)

Grading

35% Quizzes and Cogitations
25% Essays (two, equally weighted)
15% Reviews of Critical Articles (four, equally weighted)
15% Final Exam
5% Participation
5% Discussion Leading (one primary text, one critical article)

Attendance

Perfect attendance raises your final grade by one step (ex. B- to B). 1-3 absences has no effect. 4 or more absences lowers grade, the more absences, the lower the grade. 3 tardies = 1 absence.

Disabilities, Tragedies, and Trips

If you have a disability and will be requiring assistance, please contact me and the Disability Resource Center (Thompson 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations. If you have a death in the family or other tragedy this semester, please tell me, and we will work out a plan. If you are on a sports team or have another legitimate reason to miss class, let me know in advance and in writing so we can make arrangements.

Quizzes and Cogitations

Quizzes and Cogitations (response papers) are my way of giving you credit for doing the reading and digesting it. Quizzes take place at the beginning of class. Missed quizzes may not be made up. Cogitations are sometimes open topic, sometimes on an assigned question. They should be one page, typed, double-spaced. 3 = good, 2 = acceptable, 1 = weak. Cogitations are due at the beginning of class. One point will be deducted for late papers. You may skip two quizzes or cogitations without penalty.

Essays

Essay topics will be assigned in advance. They will require that you analyze, interpret, and synthesize the readings, offering textual evidence to support your argument. Each essay is 1500-1800 words, typed, double-spaced, pages numbered. All work is due at the beginning of class. Late essays receive a reduced grade.

Reviews of Critical Articles

Critical articles are essays by literary critics that analyze specific texts. This semester we'll read and discuss five critical articles from scholarly journals that will allow us to "listen in on" critical conversations taking place in professional circles about the literature we read. I will give you instructions on how to write a review of a critical article. You will be expected to submit four 2-page reviews this term (in other words, you may skip one of the five without penalty). Late reviews receive a reduced grade.

Final Exam

The final exam will be comprehensive, consisting of several essay questions.

Participation

At its best, this class will feel like a very smart book club. To achieve this goal, you must be a lively contributor to class discussions. 5 = excellent contributions to class discussions, 4 = good contributions, 3 = fine contributions, 2 = occasional contributions, 1 = respectful listening.

Discussion Leading

Class discussions are much more interesting (and surprising) if students help direct the conversation. Each student will sign up to help lead discussion twice this semester, once for a primary text, once as a member of a group responsible for a critical article. In leading discussion of a primary text, your job will

be to direct our attention to issues raised by the pages we read for that day. You might identify a particular passage in the book that seems important or puzzling in some way and use that passage to launch the discussion. Another tactic is to raise one or two tough questions for us to think about, perhaps directing our attention to passages that help us think about that question. Yet another approach is to focus on a character or incident and help us to analyze the meaning or significance of that person or scene. You might ask the class to do a few minutes of directed writing as way to focus our attention. As we progress into the semester there will be increasing opportunities for you to compare a person, scene, theme, image, technique, or passage in the book with ones we've encountered earlier. Let your own interest and sense of importance be your guide. To vary the format, you could ask students to share their Cogitations, to break up into small groups, to debate an issue. Be prepared and creative, and take this role seriously. The success of the class is in your hands. I encourage you to meet with me ahead of time to discuss your plan.

As a member of a discussion leading team on a critical article, you should meet with your group ahead of time to plan the best way to clearly summarize, analyze, and evaluate the article and to direct class discussion of it. Each group member will be expected to submit their own written review of the critical article. Perhaps one interesting approach to leading discussion would be to have group members highlight major points of disagreement among the group in your reviews of the critical article. I'll give you additional guidelines when the semester is underway.

For both discussion leading roles, I'll evaluate you on the basis of how well prepared you were, how well you directed our attention to specific details of the texts (not just abstract generalities), and how engaging, pertinent, intellectually challenging, and productive a class discussion you stimulated. 5 = excellent job, 4 = good job, 3 = fine job, 2 = iffy job, 1 = lackluster performance.

Graduate Students (English 629C)

- Fulfill the basic requirements listed above, but see me about the essay(s) requirement.
- Compile a briefly-annotated bibliography (10-12 titles) of further creative readings or film recommendations on a specific facet of the multiethnic West. See me about instructions. You will distribute and discuss this bibliography with the class on May 2.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE--Subject to change

M 1/22 Introduction
 W 1/24 Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)
 (<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/TURNER/>)

The New Western History and the Epic West

M 1/29 Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*:
 Introduction: "Closing the Frontier and Opening Western History,"
 chapter 10: "The Burdens of Western American History"
 W 1/31 Limerick, chapter 1: "Empire of Innocence"
 discuss film: *The Covered Wagon* (on reserve: VO2247, 105 min.)
 Show times: M 1/29 8:00-10:00 p.m., Instruction Room (Getchell 3)
 T 1/30 12:30-2:30 p.m., Projection Room (Getchell 5); or on your own

Here First and Still Here: Native Americans and Newcomers

M 2/5 Limerick, chapter 6: "The Persistence of Natives"
 W 2/7 Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes*

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M 2/12 Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes*
W 2/14 Winnemucca Hopkins, *Life Among the Piutes*; critical article

M 2/19 No class. Presidents' Day observed.
W 2/21 Sanchez, *Rabbit Boss*; review Limerick, chapter 6: "The Persistence of Natives"

M 2/26 Sanchez, *Rabbit Boss*
W 2/28 Sanchez, *Rabbit Boss*

M 3/5 Sanchez, *Rabbit Boss*; critical article
W 3/7 Essay 1 due

When West is East: Chinese Experience in the American West

M 3/12 Limerick, chapter 8: "Racialism on the Run"
W 3/14 Kingston, *China Men*

March 19 - 23 No class. Spring Break.

M 3/26 Kingston, *China Men*
W 3/28 Kingston, *China Men*; critical article

Changing Fortunes: Hispanic California and Texas Borderlands

M 4/2 Limerick, chapter 7: "America the Borderland"; Jackson, *Ramona*
W 4/4 Jackson, *Ramona*

M 4/9 Jackson, *Ramona*
W 4/11 Jackson, *Ramona*; critical article

M 4/16 Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*
W 4/18 Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*

M 4/23 Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*; critical article
W 4/25 discuss film: *Lone Star* (on reserve: VO7794, 135 min.)
Show times: M 4/23 8:00-10:30 p.m. Instruction Room, (Getchell 3)
T 4/24 12:00-2:30 p.m., Projection Room, (Getchell 5), or on your own

Reconsiderations and New Directions in Western American Literature

M 4/30 Essay 2 due
W 5/2 Limerick, reread chapter 10: "The Burdens of Western American History"
Graduate student presentations

M 5/7 Conclusion; Final exam handed out.

Monday, May 14, 2:15-4:15 PM Final Exam.