



University of Nevada
Geography Department
Fall Semester 2010

Instructor: Dr. Paul Starrs
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Geography 474–674: The American West

Lectures: Three hours/week; course credit—3 units; Room 227 Mackay Science, 1:00–3:45 PM. Please be there promptly, as a courtesy to your fellow students.

Office Hours: Wednesday by arrangement, or when my office door is open (knock), or by appointment (arrange by e-mail: starrs@unr.edu). If you have an urgent e-mail question, please put the course number, along with your topic, in the message “subject” header (for example: “Geog 474: What’s CPI (??)” that way I’ll know that it’s an urgent class matter, rather than random spam, and I’ll be able to answer it with more urgency.

Course Description:

A survey of the varied landscapes of the American West, designed to explore the region’s varied physical, cultural, economic, and historic life. The emphasis here is on the United States from the Great Plains to the Pacific Slope, with a minimal emphasis on Nevada (our “Silver State” is covered in another department course; Alaska and Hawai‘i are also mostly excluded). While both ordinary and singular western places are up for discussion, a number of general themes persist through the semester: Natural resources (their presence, influence, and destructive exploitation), the physiography and physical life of the West, urbanization and conflict with otherwise “rural” places; migration, settlement patterns and the region’s “colonial” status, along with current controversies faced by the urban and rural West. Scrutiny will be at a regional, state-by-state, and sometimes at the local level. The continuing subject, as always in geography, is the interplay of land and life—the reciprocal influences of people changing the land as the land itself changes them.

Course Requirements:

- 1) One midterm examination, scheduled as a closed-book take home, to be turned in Week 8 at the start of class, which is to say, on Wednesday, 13 October (20%).
- 2) A four to six page review of one of the recommended fiction or non-fiction texts (the one you pick is your choice), or of another book title that is approved early in the semester by the instructor. (15%; due Week 11, 03 November 2010).
- 3) A research paper, 8–11 pages of text, with maps, are due on the penultimate class meeting (Week 14), which is 17 November 2010. Note that this due date is the week *before* the Thanksgiving date, when the class will not meet, so you should plan your paper progress with care. The paper should cover a theme in the geography, settlement, or land use history of a part of the West OR examine an environmental controversy of current

interest involving the American West. Paper requirements will be covered in class in depth; you're required to clear your topic with the instructor well in advance (25%).

- 4) Erwin Raisz map exercise (due at last class meeting, 01 December 2010) (10%).
- 5) Attendance, participation, and completion of in-class assignments (10%).
- 6) Cumulative final examination: Scheduled for Monday, 13 Dec 2010, 2:15–4:15 pm (we will probably, as an alternative, use a take-home format) (20%).

Required Texts:

- 1) *Historical Atlas of the New West*, prepared by Derek Hayes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
- 2) *Water in the 21st Century West*, edited by Char Miller (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press; 2009)
- 3) *Imperial San Francisco*, by Gray Brechin (Berkeley: University of California Press, rev edition, 2006).
- 4) *River of Traps*, by William deBuys and Alex Harris (Trinity University Press, 2007).
- 5) "Landforms of the United States," by Erwin Raisz, (Map) 6th edition, 1957. (This is going to be available only in the bookstore at the JCSU.)
- 6) As appropriate, newspaper and magazine articles on aspects of the American West will be posted on the WebCampus class site; please do visit it, and you will be responsible for reading those articles before appropriate way-stations are reached in the class.

Texts to Select From ...

Don't let these be a source of alarm. Each of these books takes a different look at part of land and life in the American West. Look them over in any bookstore; or read on-line or published book reviews, which will help you pick whichever most takes your fancy. Then read it. The book review requirement can be met with one of these books, or by reviewing another book, but only if your alternate choice is first cleared by the instructor s. NO last-minute requests for a book change, please.

John Treadwell Nichols, *The Milagro Beanfield War*, (New York: Ballantine, 1974).

Ivan Doig, *English Creek* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

Thomas Berger, *Little Big Man* (Delta Books, 1989).

Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* ((1994).

John McPhee *Rising from the Plains* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986) (or another McPhee volume; *Basin and Range*, or *Annals of the Former Earth*, for example).

Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove* (paperback edition, 1985)

Owen Ulph, *The Fiddleback: Lore of the Line Camp* (Burlingame, CA: Brown Trout Books; 1981) (see instructor if you want to read this and have any trouble finding it.)

Books by Gretel Ehrlich, O.E. Rolvaag, Mari Sandoz, Joan Didion, and many other writers could be suitable, if you have favorites!

Weekly Readings List:

The readings listed for each week are FOR that week—they should be completed before that class meeting. The readings for Week One, accordingly, are very light, but other weeks include much more material. You are expected to have them read before the weekly class meet-

ing; that's not to be mean, but because the lectures for that week assume that you have a certain degree of background. You may ask how to study the Raisz Map: Pay genuine attention to the representation of the landforms and the place names. You should be able, after the end of a study session, to close your eyes and recreate the landscape of a given state or region, even down to the level of place names and "feature names" for the landforms of the area. Why do I ask for that level of understanding? Because, simply put, places DO matter in the American West, and the lay of the land is more than a casually named thing – it helps define the place.

Graduate Requirements:

For graduate credit (674) graduate students are required...

- 1) Complete an additional critical book review. The expectation is that you'll do two (2) reviews for this class. The first is due Week 6 (Sept 29); second one is due at the same time as the rest of the class, Week 11 (Nov 03).
- 2) Graduate student term papers should display a deeper level of knowledge than UG efforts; please plan on add 50% more material, or 12–20 pages of work. Of course, thesis or dissertation work is likely acceptable, so long and it meets the general themes of the course.

Course Outline:

The topics listed for each week are neither inclusive, nor absolutely guaranteed to be covered in any given week. They illustrate the range of topics that will probably be touched upon—in other words we won't always get to everything. With student presentations of their film projects, a typical class will be 50 minutes of lecture by the instructor, with 25 minutes given over to you the students.

25 August — Week 1:

Introduction & course organization, the "West" as a geographic concept, mountains, distance, aridity, the frontier as fact and fiction, symbols and myths.

Week One Readings: *Atlas* 6–14, Miller, 1–41.

01 September — Week 2:

Physiography (land forms), climatic patterns, the faunal landscape, the prevalence of aridity, vegetation & vegetation change, some effects of historic land use patterns. We'll discuss maps and their use. The Native American west and federal policy: Parts of the west versus the United States government policy.

Week Two Readings: *Atlas*, 15–91; Miller, 42–83; Brechin, 1–12, 13–70; start Raisz map.

08 September — Week 3:

The exploration and discovery of the west, settlement patterns, Lewis & Clark, Frémont, the Great Surveys & railroad surveys, the overland trails and travails; the inescapable influence of pemmican and the buffalo.

Week Three Readings: *Atlas*, 92–189 (esp. 120–145); Miller, 84–133.

15 September — Week 4: @ School Film Week: Watch *Chinatown*

Association of Pacific Coast Geographers Meeting, Instructor will not hold class.

Week Four Readings: Miller, 134–173; Brechin, 71–120.

Find, and watch, ALL of Roman Polanski's (dir.) *Chinatown* (widescreen DVD version, ideally; also available for \$2.99 at amazon.com, "Video on Demand" by streaming). You may elect as a whole class (or some of you) to come to class and watch this in a group setting. The classroom will be available, and I'll happily loan you a copy of the DVD.

22 September — Week 5:

The urban and urbane West, the mobile home, the "Westward Tilt" of migration patterns, Sunbelt growth & its implications, the differing character and importance of rural and city life. Government land policy, ignorance, and their role in the settlement of the West.

Week Five Readings: *Atlas*, 190–235, 236–259; Miller (skim only), 200–300. (Plus added readings on WebCampus.)

29 September — Week 6:

The Great Plains as a region: the diverse Plains, the Great American Desert in fact and fiction, Dust Bowl, winter/spring wheat, population decline; the West Militant: the Plains, the Bomb, & Wall Drug; Ogallala, the Sandhills (cattle) and Red River Valley of the north (bonanza farming); Beullah the Belle of the Lignite Belt. Grasses and Great Plains Towns.

Week Six Readings: *Atlas*, rev Great Plains exploration & settlement; Muller, 200–243.

 First Graduate Student Book Review due at this class meeting.


06 October — Week 7:

Texas and Oklahoma: Hispanic influence, cattle culture, ranching, and the several Texas, the Great Oklahoma Land Rush, the Oklahoma Territory as Indian Country. Indian displacement, vernacular regions of Texas, the Okie/Arkie migrations & effects on the rest of the West. What's big is better? Texas Cities and the cultural meld; Politics, Austin.

Week Seven Readings: review *Atlas* Texas-Southwest sections; Miller, 244–304; Brechin, 200–244. Review Raisz map, Southwest, Texas, and Great Plains sections.

13 October — Week 8:

Introduction to the Southwest: The Clash of Cultures, seen in different Hispanic, Anglo, and Indian water & land use "law."

 Midterm Examination: Due start of class Wednesday, I'll post the exam on WebCampus by 5 PM the preceding Friday; when you're ready, please take no more than 1.5 hours in answering. Handwritten pages are acceptable; typed versions preferred.

Week Eight Readings: Study for Midterm Examination. Will include anything from any lecture, film, handouts, or slides, and from the readings so far, the Raisz map, relevant sections of *Atlas*, Brechin, and Miller (ed.) (all except Part VI).

20 October — Week 9: The Southwest: Spanish-American, Indian, and Anglo landscapes, and their interaction; Sunbelt Oases, the Life and Death of a copper frontier. Big Mountain, radio station KTNN, & the fourth world among us. The strange, strained life of the Colorado River. Pleasures unique to retired life on the road & their influence on the Southwest. Santa Fe, "Flag," Tucson, Truth or Consequences.

Week Nine Readings: deBuys & Harris, *River of Traps* (all); review Colorado River sections of Miller (ed.).

27 October — Week 10:


California and Its role in the "West." Resource use questions and California: dilemmas in the making. The Pacific Slope: California, Oregon, Washington. What's California and why should we care? Lumbering, specialized agriculture

Week Ten Readings: catch up; possible quiz on Raisz map materials (up through and including the Southwest and California). Brechin, 121–200, 245–279; review *Atlas*, 98–110; review Miller, "Bay Area," and "Los Angeles" sections.

03 November — Week 11:

Rocky Mountain Country: Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, & Montana. European visitors and the West of dude ranching; the energy West of the Overthrust belt & and life atop and below the Front Range. The San Luis Valley of Colorado; montane barriers, the Oregon Trail, & the UP railroad; sodbusting; The Cascades and the Palouse. Idaho silver, rafting, and the Snake River Plain, Owyhee the livestock industry as cultural "glue." Denver and a lot of smaller places; Butte, Montana; San Luis, Colorado. Fire.

Week Eleven Readings: Raisz Map, Rocky Mtns.; Brechin, 280–330; rev Miller, "Denver."

 Book Review Essay due; turn in two complete copies; keep a third for yourself.

10 November — Week 12:

Water in the west, irrigation, and contentiousness. A profile of the agriculture of the West, and summary of the relationship between water conveyance systems and western cities. The wet Northwest; cities of Puget Sound, the Columbia River and the Willamette Valley.

Week Twelve Readings: Miller, 174–200; review *Atlas*, 236–259; review Brechin, 71–120. Northwest section of Raisz map.

17 November — Week 13

The Great Basin: Rural Nevada v. the urbanization of the Silver State. The fastest growing *State* in the *Nation* (and the notable qualities of those terms.) Basques, the livestock West, gambling, gold, and Elko, Nevada. Big cities, big spaces. Mormon Country and the greater West. The cultural mix of Nevada and Utah. Mormon and cowboy folklore. The Central Utah Project and the continuing theme of Mormon cooperative settlement.

Week Thirteen Readings: review Miller “Salt Lake City” and “Las Vegas” sections; Great Basin section of Raisz map.

 Term Paper Due. Turn in two complete copies; keep a third for yourself. Full (and correct) citations are required in your bibliography, included with the paper.

Source citations should be used whenever you draw substantially on, or quote, sources. You may attribute these in either footnotes (citations at the base of the page) or scientific notation. The latter format cites the author, date, and page in the text (Meinig 1971, 145) with the full citation, using a format of author’s name, date, book or article title, and other relevant information cited in full in the bibliography. (There will be a sheet with examples and further instructions later.) Retain the materials you used to develop your paper; since I may ask to take a look at them. No fancy covers—just one staple through the upper left corner, please. Maps are expected—either photocopied or hand-sketched.


24 November — Week 14: @ Home Film Week: No class meeting (Thanksgiving)

Find, and watch, ALL of Sergio Leone (dir.) *Once Upon a Time in the West* (widescreen version, DVD, ideally; also available at amazon.com, “Video on Demand” by streaming).

01 December — Week 15:

Wrapping water up. Energy, boomtowns, and what’s left when the booms bust. Mineral resources of the west in overview. Ranching, public lands, the Sagebrush and Bunchgrass rebellions. Settlement of the West, and a debate: ruination or best use?

Week Fifteen Readings: Everything; review Miller, “Toxic Terrain,” review Brechin, 245–330 (on the Bomb & University of California complicity); also, Brechin, 13–70 (on mining).

 Raisz Map exercise due, typed and with appropriate comments on your part.

13 December — Final Examination, scheduled by the University on 13 December (a Monday) from 2:15–4:15 PM. Likely be a take-home final exam, due at the end of the regularly scheduled final exam period.

Additional Information:

Optional reading lists will be distributed periodically to direct any of you who wants more information toward additional sources. There is no shortage of information available, especially

with the resources of the DeLaMare (Mines) Library, the Knowledge Centre), Desert Resource Institute, Nevada Historical Society, and other sources.

For the term paper you are asked to explore a topic that interests you, and the only stern warning is: GET THE PAPER IN ON TIME and broaden your research skills. An excellent style guide that you should read twice before writing any paper is E.B. White and William Strunk, Jr.'s *The Elements of Style*, which is in at least its fourth edition.

Exam theory, slides, films, and other details: Usually exams will include either a map component, a slide-examination (identify places, or the significance of geographical phenomena illustrated in slides), or both. There will be essay questions on most examinations, to be answered clearly, in full and cogent sentences, and with specific reference to the readings. To do well, acquiring detailed and specific knowledge is required, and you can help yourselves by maintaining lecture-to-lecture, and reading-by-reading lists of terms, names, or other items you think might later prove to be significant. Preparing for exams in study groups can be helpful, since in those groups you can divide and summarize the material, and help one another master course items far more easily than with each of you "going it alone." Obviously, however, it is up to you students to sort this out; I can only encourage you to do so.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS SERVICES: Your student fees cover usage of the Math Center (784-4433 or www.unr.edu/mathcenter/), Tutoring Center (784-6801 or www.unr.edu/tutoring/), and University Writing Center (784-6030 or www.unr.edu/writing_center). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. Keep in mind that seeking help outside of class is the sign of a responsible and successful student.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS: The Geography Department is committed to equal opportunity in education for all students, including those with documented physical disabilities or documented learning disabilities. University policy states that it is the responsibility of students with documented disabilities to contact instructors during the first week of each semester to discuss appropriate accommodations to ensure equity in grading, classroom experiences, and outside assignments.

FINAL NOTE: *Plagiarism* is a serious offense. I need to reserve the option to require that you provide all the research materials that you used, and all drafts that you produced, in writing your papers and essays. These will show the evolution and development of your writing. Papers are also, as a matter of routine, checked against the usually purchasable and Internet-based sources. Plagiarizing from an outside source or from a fellow student will result in an automatic F *for the course*. I would really really really hate to do this, but have had to so in the past.

Enjoy the West.

