

**QU 201**  
**National Community:**  
*The Struggle for Community in the American West: Homesteaders, Ranchers, and Native Americans*  
*Spring 2014*

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### **Course Description**

This interdisciplinary seminar for sophomores/juniors builds on experiences and learning from QU 101 and focuses on the major themes and concepts that structure life in the cultures of the pluralistic American community. The course challenges students to examine critically what it means to assume a role of informed citizenship and leadership in the United States. The topic “The Struggle for Community in the American West” focuses on the complexities arising from the diverse groups of settlers who moved West during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Themes include: relations between various ethnic groups; interactions and confrontations with Native Americans; and conflicts between homesteaders and ranchers, among others. We will read literature (novels, stories, and essays) and see films that depict these conflicts, and we will discuss and analyze these works, searching for deeper meanings that imply continued struggle or, hopefully, suggest peaceful resolution. By focusing on and interpreting underlying meanings, this course will also attempt to explore the nature of myth and to distinguish between myth and reality in the literature and films we will study. Issues such as Manifest Destiny, the role of women and their versions of the westering experience, abuses to Native Americans, abuses to the land, pollution of natural resources, conservation, increasing technology and industrialization, reality and myth-making will be discussed and analyzed. Underlying these themes and providing focus for the course will be an insistence on examining differences between the diverse cultural groups and the communities they tried (or failed) to establish.

Prerequisite: QU 101.

In our exploration of the theme of *the struggle to establish community as dramatized in the literature and film of the American West*, we will investigate these common course questions:

1. What is the meaning of community in a western context?
2. What is the effect of individualism on our concept of community and citizenship?
3. What is the effect of our pluralistic and multicultural heritage on the westward movement and on our national community?

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of QU 201, students will have demonstrated the ability to:

1. understand and appreciate the cultures of the pluralistic American community, including not only the dominant white but other cultural traditions, such as the Native American, Hispanic, etc., in a way that articulates an appreciation for difference in a variety of forms;

2. critically examine the influence of the frontier and the westward movement (on American literature) and understand the difficulty in trying to construct a sense of community under adverse, conflicting, and sometimes violent conditions in the American West;
3. explore major themes and concepts emerging from western literature and film;
4. evaluate the literary, historical, and cultural perspectives dramatized in the literature and films studied in the seminar,
5. make plausible interpretations and informed opinions about topics covered in the seminar and communicate them in effective written and oral form.
6. explore the nature of myth and reality in our westering movement as affected by the opportunity to mold a fresh society.

### Required Materials

De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. [selections]

Takaki, Ronald. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*.

Doctorow, E. L. *Ragtime*.

Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*

William Faulkner---*The Unvanquished*

James Welch, *Winter in the Blood*

Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping*

*The Literary West, (LW)*, ed. by Tom Lyon--selections from writings by Lewis and Clark, Sarah Winnemucca, Jack Schaefer, Willa Cather, Ed Abbey, Sam Shepard, Rick Bass, Leslie Silko, and Larry McMurtry.

### Requirements:

**ATTENDANCE—MANDATORY. Absence will result in a lower grade or forced withdrawal. One final note: Faulkner, Welch, Robinson, and Doctorow are difficult (ESPECIALLY FAULKNER). You have to spend time with them, linger over certain passages, reread a lot. In addition, you will be expected to speak in every class; failure to make a response or to volunteer a comment will result in a 0 for class participation for that day---think of it as a daily quiz. Again, these authors are difficult, but the rewards of analyzing their texts, placing yourself in the situations they create, climbing inside their characters' heads are mighty and unforgettable.**

**PROCEDURES: Class discussion, oral presentations, and some lectures: 2 Oral presentations, two papers, mid-term, journal, and final exam. Papers must state a thesis and support it through extensive reference to the texts. Secondary sources may be used (quote and document them, of course; see me, if you have any questions about this), but should not be emphasized. The papers should be the result of your own examination and synthesis. I'm not concerned with how well you can glean critical commentary and reiterate it; I am concerned with your own analysis and interpretation (not opinion). The journals should not be notes on your reading, but rather your impressions of scenes, characters, incidents, ideas, and your awareness of recurrent themes, symbols, and writing techniques--elaborating more on the questions raised in class and brainstorming for ideas for papers.**

### **Intellectual Presence**

You are expected to come to class prepared to engage in the material as active, collaborative participants. Your participation is vital to your learning as well as to the learning of the other students. The intellectual presence requirement includes attendance, participation, and courtesy.

### **Grading**

Final grades will be based on the following (approximate):

Oral presentations & class participation----	10 %
1 <sup>st</sup> test	10 %
1st paper	10 %
2nd paper	20 %
Journal	30 %
Final exam	20 %

We will attend an academic event as a class.

### **Integrity and Academic Honesty Policy:**

“Integrity is a crucial part of the academic experience. I expect you to be honest with me in all conversations and discussions and to treat fellow students and me with respect. You must observe the University Academic Integrity Policy as found in the Quinnipiac University Student Handbook. You must always do your own work, and you may never plagiarize or cheat on tests or papers. Follow the guidelines attached to this syllabus and any others handed out during the semester. Furthermore, all work you turn in must be completed by you for this specific class. Failure to follow this policy could lead to an “F” in the course, suspension, and even expulsion from the University. By taking the course and by attending Quinnipiac University you agree to these conditions. Please see me at any time with questions.”

**SCHEDULE--All items listed after a date are due on that date and films must be seen prior to the class in which they will be discussed.**

**1st Week--1/21 & 23:** Introduction and overview of course. Early versions of America and the West. Read and discuss the following short handouts: Wm. Bradford's "The Mayflower Compact" (1620) in connection with the Puritan Covenant Theology; also John Conron's "Cultivation of the Promised Land"; Mary Rowlandson's "Narrative of Captivity" (1682)--an example of captivity narratives--Indians as Devils. **Most important--D. H. Lawrence's essay--"Spirit of Place" (handout) and Tom Lyon's "Introduction" (pp. 1-30 in *LW*). Pay special attention to the Western Chronology beginning on p. 19.**

**2nd Week--1/28:** Selections from "Lewis and Clark" (*LW*, p. 46)--  
Sarah Winnemucca (*LW*, p. 65)-- . Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, selections (Blackboard/Reserve)--

**1/30:** Finish de Tocqueville and begin--*Huck Finn* (1884) and oral presentations:  
Huck-- Tom--

**3rd Wk–2/4:** *Huck Finn*; oral presentations: Grangerfords/Sheppardsons-- Jim--  
Duke and King— Boggs/Sherburn--- essay by Leo Marx--

2/6: Finish *Huck Finn* and begin selections from Jack Schaefer's novel *Shane* (1949).  
Discuss chapter 1 (*LW*, 177-83) + last chapter (handout)--- Also,  
the Homestead Act & the communal history of homesteaders/ranchers in Jackson Hole,  
Wy---

**4th Wk–2/11:** Discuss George Stevens's *Shane* (1953)-- on reserve at the main desk of the library. NB—the film must be seen before class. Shane--- Joe--  
Marion--- Riker-- Homesteaders---  
Wilson--- Images/symbols---  
Thesis statement and points of support for 1st paper due—take an aspect of the western myth as it effects communal & individual relationships and analyze it in one of the selections we've read. NB: use Alberti's paragraph on "Painting" as a model.

2/13: **Return T.S.** Finish discussion of film emphasizing the conflicting communities, in addition to the mythic and symbolic dimensions of the characters, especially Shane. Begin discussing Takaki--*A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*.

**5th Wk–2/18:** 1st paper due. Continue Takaki. Distribute handouts on *The Unvanquished* (1936).

2/20: **FIRST TEST** ---All material thus far, including texts, DVD, and handouts.

**6th Wk–2/25:** **Begin Faulkner; before class, see DVD--*Land Into Legend* (# 882)--on reserve at the main desk of the library.** The theme of the individual vs. the community, in addition to Revenge, Retribution, Initiation and Growth to Maturity. 1<sup>st</sup> 2stories in *UNV* --"Ambuscade"-- Retreat"---  
Return 1st papers---to be corrected and returned to me by 3/4.

2/27: Continue *Unv*---Raid"-- Riposte in Tertio"---  
"Vendee"

**7th Wk–3/4:** Return 1<sup>st</sup> papers to me. "Skirmish at Sartoris"- "An Odor of Verbena"

3/6: **Journals due (1<sup>st</sup> half).** Finish Faulkner. Begin discussing the influence of Realism and Naturalism on community/individual relations in literature.

3/10—3/16--- **HAPPY QU SPRING BREAK!!!!**

**8th Wk–3/18:** Stephen Crane short stories, "The Blue Hotel"--  
"Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (both on Blackboard & Google)---  
Return Journals.

**3/20:** “The West of the Pioneer and Homesteader;” “Intro to Part VI,” (handout)---  
 selections from Stewart’s *Letters from a Woman Homesteader*. **See the film *Heartland* (1979) before class.** Discuss: Mrs. Stewart--- Mr. Stewart---  
 Jerrine— Mrs. Landower--- Symbols/images---

**9th Wk. Tu. 3/25:** Closing of the West: Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier  
 in American History” (1893) (Handout)-- Native American writer  
 James Welch---*Winter in the Blood* (1974), 1<sup>st</sup> chap. Narrator (1<sup>st</sup> half)--

**Thur 3/27:** Narrator (2<sup>nd</sup> half)-- Airplane man---  
 Wife- Teresa--- Lame Bull----  
 Grandmother -- Yellow Calf---

**10th Wk. 4/1:** Finish *Winter*. Begin Women in the New West: *Housekeeping* (1980).  
 Grandfather (Edmond)--- Sylvia-- Helen (mother) and sister---  
 Sylvie--- Lucille--- Ruth---  
 Townspeople--- Landsc & Envir--- Images and symbols--

**4/3:** See film *Housekeeping* (1987) before class. Discuss both film and book.

**11th Wk. Tu 4/8:** Begin Sam Shepard's “True West” (1980) *LW*, 248), and see the DVD  
**before class.** Writer (Austin)--- Desert Rat (Lee) ---  
 Agent (Saul)--- Mom--- Images & Symbols—

**Thur 4/10:** Finish “True West”. **T. S. and pts. of support for 2nd paper due---Take one of the established myths of the 19th century and show how a modern (20<sup>th</sup> century) writer/filmmaker undermines or demythologizes it in relation to individual/communal relations.**

**12th Wk. Tu 4/15:** Return T.S. More about Native American writers and native traditions.—  
 Lyon’s “Introduction” (*LW*, 208)-- Luther Standing Bear--“Nature” (*LW*,  
 145)-- and Leslie Silko--“The Man to Send Rain Clouds” (handout)--

**Thurs 4/17:** Literature as a reflection of environmental concerns. E. Abbey—“Great  
 American Desert” (*LW*, 226)--- C. Bowden--“Afterword” (*LW*, 350)--

**13th Wk. Tu 4/22:** Rick Bass--“Days of Heaven” (*LW*, 384)---  
 Larry McMurtry’s “How the West Was Won or Lost” (handout)---

**Thur 4/24:** Final paper due. **See Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven* (1992) before class.**  
 Discuss film. Wm. Munny--- Schofield Kid--- Ned---  
 Role of women--- Sheriff Daggett--- English Bob---  
 Beauchamp (dime novelist)--- my essay---

**14<sup>th</sup> Wk. Tu 4/29:** Doctorow, *Ragtime*. Compare/contrast communal/individual relations

in the West with those in the East (people who didn't move West).

Thurs 5/1: Finish *Ragtime*. Journals due (2<sup>nd</sup> half).

FINAL EXAM--All material of semester: texts, DVDs, handouts, reserve items.  
CHEERS & BLESSINGS!

**Dates by which the films have to be seen:**

*Shane*—2/11

*Faulkner (# 882)*---2/25

*Heartland*---3/20

*Housekeeping*---4/3

*True West*---4/8

*Unforgiven*---4/24