The American West

AMSTUD 124A, ARTHIST 152, ENGLISH 124, HISTORY 151, POLISCI 124A

WAYS: WAY-AII; WAY-SI

(last updated: March 22, 2022)

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Office Hours
Bruce Cain By appointment (email Marco at marcomtz@stanford.edu)
Shelley Fisher Fishkin By appointment (email sfishkin@stanford.edu)
David Freyberg Announced on Canvas after the first week (some in person, Y2E2 257, some via Zoom)
David Kennedy By appointment
Course Objectives

This course integrates several disciplinary perspectives into a comprehensive examination of western North America—its history, physical geography, climate, institutions, politics, demography, economy, and continuing policy challenges, as well as its artistic and cultural expression of people in the region.

The course will examine how the West came to be ultimately viewed as distinctive. Students will understand how geology, topography, and climate—aridity in particular—have shaped the region’s history, development and public policies. Aridity accounts in part for the fact that the federal government is the region’s largest landlord, controlling more than 50 percent of the West’s surface area. In addition, Western governance is complicated and distinctively shaped by its populist culture, direct democracy options, and highly fractured system of local jurisdictions. Direct democracy, for instance, enables more innovative programs to manage climate change and the environment, but the dispersion of jurisdictional responsibilities makes it harder to implement them.

Students will also examine transformations in the West’s demography and its economy. The West has been the nation’s most demographically dynamic region since World War II. Massive wartime and postwar internal migration has given way in recent decades to transnational migration, notably from Mexico and Asia. And the West is home to a majority of the nation’s Native Americans. Migration, of course, closely tracks economic patterns. The transformation of the West from a natural resource extraction economy to a high-tech economy—with Silicon Valley its exemplar and locomotive—will be another course theme, as will the policy issues attending the prospects for the West’s environmental, demographic, and economic future.

Participating in vigorous analytical discussions and writing papers on western trends, students will be able to analyze westerners’ behavior and western social organizations using data or primary source material.

The course will also examine the long tradition of rendering and expressing the West in art, film, and literature. In addition to analyzing poems, essays, short stories, and excerpts from longer works, the course will focus on paintings, photography, sculpture, and prints of the American West. The goal is for students to understand that these various accounts are not illustrations of the West but rather inventions that suited the ideological needs of particular moments. The portrayal of western peoples differed from one period to the next, and the same is true for borders, water, and the landscape itself. At the same time, the goal is to note how the works we study can—sometimes—introduce us to states of feeling not easily categorizable by recourse to social or ideological explanations.
Course requirements
Students are responsible for attending all lectures and sections for this course. Modules in Canvas will help you navigate your way through the course. All materials for the week will be released the Friday prior. These materials will include all the readings associated to a specific lecture and required viewing videos. Students are expected to attend all in-person course lectures, participate in section discussions, attend a special visit to the Anderson Collection, and complete the course readings in order to receive credit for this class. Students will also have written assignments to complete.

Readings
Readings are posted on Canvas modules and will be released as assigned. Many of our readings are made available through Stanford Libraries’ restricted databases, electronic journals, or e-books. In order to access these readings, you must be connected to the Stanford network. If you are having trouble accessing these readings, you should test your connection by visiting http://library.stanford.edu/using/connect-campus.

Lectures and discussion sections
Class lectures will include 2 or 3 back-to-back lectures. Attendance at lecture is imperative to your participation in weekly discussion sections, as well as to your written assignments. PLEASE NOTE: Discussion sections are only for students in the course. DCI and auditors will not be enrolled in discussion sections.

Weekly assignments: 3&1 responses
Students will submit on Canvas 3 bulleted observations (a couple of sentences each) about what you found insightful, interesting or disagreed with in the lectures and reading PLUS 1 question you would like answered or discussed in the section. This 3 & 1 assignment should be posted on Canvas for your TA’s to collect by 5pm Pacific Time on Wednesday for that week’s Thursday discussion section. This material will serve as the basis for discussion, so it is imperative that these questions be submitted on time. Completion of the 3&1 assignments and full participation in the weekly discussion sections is expected.

Two essay assignments
Students will complete one midterm paper (8-10 pages) due April 26th. The final paper (10-12 pages in length) will be due June 3rd. These essays will test your ability to synthesize the diverse interdisciplinary perspectives offered in this course into an understanding of the American West as a distinct region. More information about these assignments is forthcoming and will be posted on Canvas.

Event Attendance
Students are expected to attend two events and submit on Canvas a write up of the event.
Possible events:

April 26, 2022  Bill Lane Center virtual event, John Leshy on “Our Common Ground”

April 27, 2022, 4:30pm  Stanford Historical Society presents “Searsville Before Stanford: History and Archaeology in the Upper San Francisquito Watershed”

May 4, 2022, 2pm  Bill Lane Center virtual event, Author Mark Arax in conversation with Felicia Marcus about “A Dreamt Land-Chasing Water and Dust Across California”

May 6-8, 2022  Stanford Powwow

May 20, 2022  Bill Lane Center event, Professor Richard Nevle and Steven Nightingale in conversation with Nicole Ardoin

Grading Breakdown

Class Participation  30%

- 3&1 responses to the lectures and readings
- Contributions to section discussions

Essay #1  30%

Essay #2  40%

Students with Documented Disabilities

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE), located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (723-1066, http://oae.stanford.edu). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE ASAP since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

Distinguished Career Institute (DCI) students
We are glad to have DCI students in the American West course. Please note that DCI students should not attend weekly sections with the TAs and instead will have the opportunity to attend an optional one-time section led by the faculty.

**Electronics policy**
Electronics, including but not limited to laptops and mobile phones, are not permitted during lectures for this course. If you have a need for this, please speak with your TA. Please refer to OAE for information regarding assistive technology.

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**WEEK 1**

**March 29**
**INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE**

**Course introduction**
*Professor Kennedy*

**Introduction to the Literature and Art of the West**
*Professor Fishkin*

**Introduction to the Geography of the West**
*Professor Freyberg*

**Competing Western Narratives**
*Professor Cain*

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**March 31**
**THEME 1: SPACE AND TIME**

**Buffalo Bill, Cody, Frederick Jackson, Turner, and Mt. Rushmore**
*Professor Kennedy*

Readings:
- Frederick Jackson Turner, *“The Significance of the Frontier in American History”* (1893)

**Writing the West**
*Professor Fishkin*

Readings:
- Twain, Mark. “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog.” 1865.
- Twain, Mark. “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses.” 1895.
WEEK 2

April 5
THEME 1: SPACE AND TIME

The West Enters American History
Professor Kennedy

Deep Time and the Creation of the American West
Professor Freyberg

Required Viewing:
- "The West as America" exhibition at the Smithsonian, 1991
  Professor Nemerov
  Readings:
    ○ Stein, Visualizing Content
- The Portrayal of the American West, 1830-1860
  Professor Nemerov

April 7
THEME 1: SPACE AND TIME

Open Space vs. Bordered Space in the West
Professor Fishkin
Readings:
- OPTIONAL: Lynch Mobs Killed Latinos Across the West. The Fight to Remember These Atrocities is Just Starting.” New York Times 3/2/19
  https://nyti.ms/2VxZwLJ
WEEK 3

April 12
THEME 1: SPACE AND TIME

The Spatial Consequences of Time: Western Natural Resources

Professor Freyberg

Mobility vs. Confinement in the West

Professor Fishkin

Readings:


April 14
THEME 2: Peoples Then and Now

Sharing Resources: Native Americans, Reservations, and Water

Professor Freyberg

Required Viewing:

● Breakthrough: Bitter Water–Professor Karletta Chief

Native Americans

Professor Kennedy

Reading:

● Walker, Francis A. “The Indian Question.” J.R. Osgood and Company Boston (1874)
WEEK 4

April 19
THEME 2: Peoples Then and Now

Immigration
Professor Kennedy

Reconstructing Chinese Railroad Workers’ Lives
Professor Fishkin

- Browse the website of Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University: [http://chineserailroadworkers.stanford.edu](http://chineserailroadworkers.stanford.edu)

Required Viewing:
- A Conversation with Connie Young Yu and Shelley Fisher Fishkin

April 21
THEME 2: Peoples Then and Now

The Chinese in the West: Discrimination and Exclusion
Professor Fishkin

Readings:

  - [http://www.twainquotes.com/Galaxy/187010b.html](http://www.twainquotes.com/Galaxy/187010b.html)
  - [http://www.twainquotes.com/Galaxy/187101e.html](http://www.twainquotes.com/Galaxy/187101e.html)

Black California Writers
Professor Fishkin

Readings:

**Required Viewing:**

- **The Port Chicago Disaster: Racial Injustice During World War II**  
  *Professor Nemerov*
  
  Readings:

*PLEASE NOTE* Section attendance this week will be a required visit to the Anderson Collection to view Wendy Red Star’s exhibit in preparation for her visit to class next week. Information regarding this will be communicated by the TA team on Canvas.

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**WEEK 5**

**April 26**

**THEME 2: Peoples Then and Now**

**FIRST ESSAY DUE (APRIL 26)**

**Native American Voices Remember Wounded Knee**  
*Professor Fishkin*

Readings:


Artist Wendy Red Star in conversation with Professor Fishkin

April 28
THEME 3: Water, Energy, and Fire

Water: Too Little (Aridity and Drought)?
Professor Freyberg

John Wesley Powell and the Tyranny of Climate
Professor Kennedy
Readings:

WEEK 6

May 3
THEME 3: Water, Energy, and Fire

Writing Aridity in the West
Professor Fishkin
Readings:
• OPTIONAL: Rivera, Tomás. “Los niños no se aguantaron / The Children Couldn’t Wait.” ...Y No Se Lo Tragó La Tierra...And the Earth Did Not Swallow Him. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1987. 7-9, 87-89.
May 5

THEME 3: Water, Energy, and Fire

Water: Too Much (Floods)?
Professor Freyberg

Water Politics / Risky Business: Aridity, Wildfires and the West
Professor Cain

Readings:
- John T. Abatzoglou and A. Park Williams, “Impact of anthropogenic climate change on wildfire across western US forests” PNAS October 18, 2016 113 (42) 11770-11775; published ahead of print October 10, 2016 https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1607171113

WEEK 7

May 10

THEME 4: Politics and Policy

How the West Was Won
Professor Kennedy

Managing Public Lands in the West/Tribal Governance and Federalism in the West
Professor Cain

Reading:
- Mary Ann King, Co-Management or Contracting -Agreements between Native American Tribes and the U.S. National Park Service Pursuant to the 1994 Tribal Self-Governance Act, 31 Harv. Envtl. L. Rev. pp 475-493 only

Required Viewing:
- Native Americans, Treaties, Courts – Conversation with Professor Greg Ablavsky, Sarah Sadlier, Tanner Allread

May 12

THEME 4: Politics and Policy

Populism and Direct Democracy in the West/Multiculturalism
WEEK 8

May 17
THEME 4: Politics and Policy

Texas, California, and the Future of the West
Professor Kennedy and Professor Cain
Readings:
- Schrag, Peter, *California: America's High Stakes Experiment* (UC Press, 2008), Intro and Chapter 1
Required Viewing:
- Conversation with Destin Jenkins

May 19
THEME 5: Boom and Bust

Gold and Other Rushes
Professor Kennedy

Irrigation: Boom and Bust?
Professor Freyberg

WEEK 9

May 24
THEME 5: Boom and Bust

Writing the Gold Rush and the Silver Boom
Professor Fishkin
Readings:
• Dame Shirley. *The Shirley Letters from California Mines in 1851-52*. San Francisco: Thomas C. Russell, 2007. Letter the sixth (pp. 77-86), twelfth (pp. 163-176), fourteenth (pp. 191-204), fifteenth (pp. 205-222), and twenty-second (pp. 317-334).

**The West’s Changing Climate**  
*Professor Freyberg*

**May 26**  
**THEME 5: Boom and Bust**

**Transforming the Western Economy**  
*Professor Cain*  
Reading:
  [https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6xc7316c](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6xc7316c).

**Additional Lecture TBD**

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**WEEK 10**

**May 31**  
**THEME 5: Boom and Bust**

**Europe Discovers the West**  
*Professor Fishkin*  
Reading

**The Modern Western Economy**  
*Professor Kennedy*  
Reading:

**June 3**  
**THEME 5: Boom and Bust**
SECOND ESSAY DUE (JUNE 3)