

AMST 111a

fall 2007 – t/f 12:10-1:30 pm

Schwartz 3

Images of the American West in Film and Culture

Tona Hangen

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course description

Explores images of the American West through film, literature, history, art, photography, and other cultural productions, to understand how these images reflected and shaped American identities, ideologies, and mythologies. Through films, novels, and other supplementary readings, examines the intertwined themes of progress, civilization, region, nation, democracy, race, gender, and violence.

about the instructor

I'm a historian of twentieth century popular culture, media, and religion with a fascination for the American West. I have also taught (or will be teaching this year) courses on radio in American culture, American religious pluralism, early American history, women's history, and Native American history. I've published several books and articles about radio, particularly religious broadcasting, and am working on a book about the United Nations in American culture and domestic politics. I am best reached by email if you want to schedule a meeting or discuss something about the course, as I hop between two offices on campus and may not keep regular office hours or check phone messages.

films we'll screen together

You received a list from me over the summer of "essential" Westerns. Sadly, we cannot see them all. I've chosen a few that are emblematic from different decades, and added some that might push the definition of "Western" in interesting ways. The list below represents the films we'll screen in their entirety on Tuesday nights, and the starred films are also available digitally streamed, linked to course Moodle.

Documentaries

Lewis and Clark: Corps of Discovery/ Ken Burns (1997, PBS)

Nobody's Girls: Five Women of the American West (1995, PBS)

Dramatic Films

The Great Train Robbery (1903)

Stagecoach/ John Ford (1939)

High Noon/ Fred Zinnemann (1952)

The Searchers/ John Ford (1956)

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly/ Sergio Leone (1966)

Chinatown/ Roman Polanski (1974)

Koyaanisqatsi/ Godfrey Reggio (1982)

El Norte/ Gregory Nava (1983)

Thelma & Louise/ Ridley Scott (1991)

Unforgiven/ Clint Eastwood (1992)

A note on film viewing: In order to provide an opportunity for you to see each of these important films, we will hold screenings on Tuesday evenings as noted in the syllabus below. We will screen and discuss selected scenes in class, but our class discussions will assume that you have seen the entire film. Attendance at the screenings will be noted, so please make every effort to be there. If you can't make the screening in a particular week, you may view the week's film on your own time. I welcome comparisons with Westerns that we haven't screened together, so it will benefit you immensely if you take the time to see a few other Westerns outside of class on your own (the summer list is posted as "Western Wiki" on Moodle, open for our collective revision and comment).

reading list

In addition to screening and discussing films, we'll also be reading Western novels and scholarship about the West and Westerns. These books are available at the bookstore for your purchase, since we'll read them in their entirety (more or less). They will *not* be available on the course Moodle, so make sure you own these texts and bring them to class on the day we're discussing them. The "recommended reading list" below includes books that we'll be reading in bits and pieces, or which provide useful commentary. Those bits and pieces will be posted as PDFs on Moodle and will be placed on library reserve if Brandeis owns them, so you don't have to purchase these recommended texts unless you love this topic and want to add to your personal library.

Required Reading

Jeffrey Wallmann, *The Western: Parables of the American Dream*
Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*
Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own: A New History of the American West*
Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*
Rachel Calof, *Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains*
Zane Grey, *Riders of the Purple Sage*
Nathaniel West, *Day of the Locust*
Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family*
Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

Recommended Reading

John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel*
William Cronon et al, *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*
David Lusted, *The Western (Inside Film)*
Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*
Katie Lee, *Glen Canyon Betrayed*
Neil Campbell, *Cultures of the New American West*

grading, assignments, and course business

Please attend class faithfully and be prepared for our discussions. In addition to your general preparedness and lively participation in class, you will have the opportunity to present short research topics twice during the semester. Consult the “Class Jumpstarters” list on Moodle for ideas, and sign up in class for two presentation dates sometime this fall. You’ll also write 4 papers, one of which will be a well-developed final project. More details about those assignments will be available on the course Moodle. Get to know the Moodle well, I make extensive use of it in this course.

Your grade will be determined this way:

Attendance and participation	25%
Jumpstarters (2 @ 10% each)	20%
Shorter Papers (3 @ 10% each)	30%
<u>Final Project</u>	<u>25%</u>
	100%

- If you have a documented disability on record with Brandeis University, and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this course, please consult with me immediately at the outset of the course.
- All work submitted for this course must be your own; plagiarism is intolerable (and easily avoidable) and will be referred to the student judicial system.

syllabus/ course outline

Consider this deep irony: the decades that created the “classic” film image of the American West also saw increasing federalization, environmental degradation, rapid urban growth, and border-crossing, completely altering the West at the same time that its mythic images were being cemented in American cinema and art. We will explore both image and reality in the American West, consider the power of the concept of the American frontier by looking at 19th century realities, 20th century cinematic reconstructions, and 20th century social change, cultural realities, and peoples of the crossroads region(s) west of the Mississippi.

This course takes an integrative approach to the region, using history, literature, art, geography, cultural and media studies to unpack the meaning—past, present, and future—of the American West. This approach will help frame the films and your understanding of how the West has been represented (and re-presented) in the public imagination. It is not meant to be a comprehensive course, and so will jump around a bit in time and topic, hopefully touching on many key topics, characters, places, and ideas and exploring a few of those in depth throughout the semester.

#	date	topic	reading	what's due
1	8/31 Fr	Part One: "Mapping" the West: as Territory, Intellectual Problem, as Social Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) [in-class reading, also posted as PDF] Faragher's introduction 	
2	9/4 Tu	Lewis and Clark – What did they discover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lewis and Clark diary excerpts (complete document report for homework) Faragher, "Frontier Trail: Rethinking Turner and Reimagining the American West" (PDF) 	Completed L&C document report
*	9/4 Tu	Screening of <i>Lewis and Clark: Corps of Discovery</i>	Screening at 7 pm in Schwartz 3 (same time & place for all screenings)	
3	9/7 Fr	Claiming the West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iverson, "Discoverers, Pioneers, and Settlers: Towards a More Inclusive History of the North American West," (PDF) White, <i>It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own</i>, Ch. 2-3 Smith, <i>Virgin Land</i>, Book One (Ch 1-4) 	
4	9/11 Tu	Part Two: 19th Century Western Realities – People, Places & Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Calof, <i>Rachel Calof's Story: Jewish Homesteader on the Northern Plains</i> (entire) Five homesteading documents, to wit: 1) Olympic WA family histories; 2) Nebraska homesteader; 3) Daniel Freeman Homestead Application; 4) Daniel Freeman Homestead Proof; 5) Daniel Freeman Homestead Certificate. Please bring copies of the 3 Freeman documents to class. Smith, <i>Virgin Land</i>, Ch 15 "The Agrarian Utopia" For additional background if needed, White Ch. 6-7 	
*	9/11 Tu	Screening of <i>Nobody's Girls: Five Women of the American West</i>		
	9/14 Fr	<i>Rosh Hashanah holiday, no class</i>		

#	date	topic	reading	what's due
5	9/18 Tu	Western Folks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Ch 5-8 and 12 • Tompkins Ch 9 "At the Buffalo Bill Museum" • Bret Harte, "The Outcasts of Poker Flats" in <i>The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Sketches</i> (e-book online in Lion [Literature Online] through Brandeis Library databases). If the link doesn't work, just do a search in Lion, e.g. for "Harte" and "Roaring" and the short story is found on pp. 19-36, under "Sketches." • Also, check out the information online from the Chinese in California image & document database – very well done. 	Paper #1
*	9/18 Tu	Triple Feature	Screening of <i>The Great Train Robbery</i> ; silent Western clips; and <i>Stagecoach</i> (1939)	
6	9/21 Fr	Part Three: "Western" as Genre Dime Novels and "Penny Dreadfuls"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tompkins, <i>West of Everything</i>, introduction • Wallmann, Trailblazin' and Brush Bustin' (pp. 36-92) • Smith, <i>Virgin Land</i> Ch 9-10 (and 8 if you have time) • Browse some of the online links to dime novel covers • If time, check out the "first" Beadle dime novel, fulltext online, the title is <i>Malaeska, The Indian Wife of the White Hunter</i> (1860), <i>Buffalo Bill's Adventures</i> (fulltext link), or excerpts from Davy Crockett (PDF) • Optional, but recommended: before next Friday, absorb Ch. 1-3 of Cawelti's <i>Six-Gun Mystique Sequel</i> and consider the special issue of Images I've posted ("The Western, An Overview") 	Note: class will be held in the University Archives in the library, to take advantage of our huge collection of dime novels
7	9/25 Tu	Early Western Writers who Actually Went West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Twain, <i>Roughing It</i> Ch. 1 and 9-12 (e-book online through LION) • Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" (PDF) • Owen Wister, <i>The Virginian</i> (Read Ch 1-3, and 25. Ch 21 is hilarious if you have extra time and like the book) • Tompkins, Ch 7 "The Virginian: Wister's Mother" • Wallmann, pp. 94-112 	
*	9/25 Tu	Screening of <i>High Noon</i> (1952)		
8	9/28 Fr	Zane Grey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tompkins, Ch. 8 "Zane Grey: Writing the Purple Sage" • Wallmann, pp. 113-130 • Zane Grey, <i>Riders of the Purple Sage</i> (entire) 	

#	date	topic	reading	what's due
9	10/2 Tu	L'Amour and McMurtry: 20 th Century Prolific, Popular Hacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louis L'Amour, "Battle at Burnt Camp" in <i>Monument Rock</i> (PDF) • Louis L'Amour, excerpt from <i>Last of the Breed</i> (PDF) • Larry McMurtry, <i>Lonesome Dove</i> excerpt (PDF) • Tompkins, Ch 10 "The Last of the Breed: Homage to Louis L'Amour" and Ch 11 "Two Men" 	
*	10/2 Tu	Screening of <i>The Searchers</i> (1956)		
10	10/5 Fr	Discussion day: the Western as Literary & Film Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tompkins, Ch. 1-6, "Elements of the Western" • Wallman, Runaway Buckin' to Bitin' the Dust, Ridin' It Out (pp. 135-177) • Annie Proulx, "Brokeback Mountain" (PDF) 	
	10/9 Tu	<i>Brandeis Thursday, no class</i>		
*	10/9 Tu	Screening of <i>The Good, The Bad & the Ugly</i> (1966)		
11	10/12 Fri	Part Four: Gender and Violence in Images of the West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frederick Remington paintings, see online links and posted images • White Ch 13 (pp. 328-352) • Edward Buscombe, "Painting the Legend: Frederick Remington and the Western" in <i>John Ford Made Westerns: Filming the Legend in the Sound Era</i> (PDF) 	
12	10/16 Tu	Western Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mary Murphy, "Private Lives of Public Women: Prostitution in Butte, Montana 1878-1917" in <i>The Women's West</i> • Susan Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers: The Significance of Gender in the History of the American West," <i>Western Historical Quarterly</i>, Nov 1993 • Browse the Western Women online exhibit from the Autry Museum 	Paper #2
*	10/16 Tu	Screening of <i>Unforgiven</i> (1992)		
13	10/19 Fr	The Slotkin Thesis	Richard Slotkin, <i>Gunfighter Nation</i> excerpt (PDF in 2 parts)	
14	10/23 Tu	Fistfights and Gunfights	Lee Clark Mitchell, "A Man Being Beaten" in <i>Western: Making the Man in Fiction and Film</i> (PDF)	

#	date	topic	reading	what's due
*	10/23 Tu	Screening of <i>Thelma and Louise</i> (1991)		
15	10/26 Fr	Pt 4 Discussion Day	Please review "The Western, an Overview" in <i>Images</i> (posted on Moodle)	
16	10/30 Tu	Part Five: 20th Century Western People and Culture – some snapshots Japanese Internment; Asians in the West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uchida, <i>Desert Exile</i> • David Goldstein-Shirley, "Enemies in their Own Land," in Esther Ghymn, <i>Asian American Studies: Identity, Images Past and Present</i> • White Ch. 16 and 18 • Browse the JARDA database, Ansel Adam's photos from Manzanar, and the letters to Miss Breed from interned children (links on Moodle) • Also see the online resources for Asians in the West from WestWeb 	
*	10/30 Tu	Screening of <i>Chinatown</i>		
17	11/2 Fr	"Sin City" #1 – 1930s Hollywood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nathaniel West, <i>Day of the Locust</i> (entire) • Also consult the images from 1930s Hollywood posted on Moodle 	Prospectus for Final Project
18	11/6 Tu	"Sin City" #2 – Las Vegas, ca. 1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hunter S. Thompson, <i>Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas</i> excerpt (PDF) • White Ch 19 (pp. 541-573) • Online maps and images from Las Vegas digital archives (Moodle) 	
19	11/9 Fr	Part Six: The Federal West Water Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donald Worster, <i>Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West</i> excerpt (PDF) • Marc Reisner, <i>Cadillac Desert</i> excerpt (PDF) 	
20	11/13 Tu	Nuclear Testing and Downwinders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Williams, "The Clan of One-Breasted Women" (PDF) • Ed Kociela, "Downwinders: A Play" (PDF – it's long – skim) • Fuller, <i>The Day We Bombed Utah</i> (PDF in 2 parts) • Poems from <i>Atomic Ghost</i> (PDF) 	
*	11/13 Tu	Screening of <i>Koyaanisqatsi</i>		
21	11/16 Fr	Lake Powell: Epitaph for Glen Canyon	Katie Lee, <i>Glen Canyon Betrayed</i> (excerpt, TBA)	Paper #3
22	11/20 Tu	Part 7: Documentarians of the West: Big Eye for the Big Sky	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martha Sandweiss, <i>Print the Legend: Photography and the American West</i> excerpt (PDF) • Ansel Adams and Georgia O-Keeffe images posted online 	

#	date	topic	reading	what's due
	11/23 Fr	<i>Thanksgiving holiday, no class</i>		
23	11/27 Tu	Part Eight: Revising/ Demystifying the Iconic American West & Western	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Ch 20-21 (pp. 574-632) • Campbell, <i>Cultures of the American New West</i>, introduction and Ch 1 	
24	11/30 Fr	Contemporary Western culture and fiction <i>Also: in-class discussion of final projects</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barbara Kingsolver, <i>Animal Dreams</i> • Website for the Western Writers Association 	
25	12/4 Tu	Postmodernizing the West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gloria Anzaldua, <i>La Frontera/ The Borderlands</i> excerpt (PDF) • Hsu, "Authentic Re-Creations" (PDF) • Also check out the "Hawking the West" sites I've linked 	
*	12/4 Tu	Screening of <i>El Norte</i>		
26	12/7 Fr	Discussion Day for Parts 6-8	Howard Lamar, "Westering in the 21 st Century: Speculations on the Future of the Western Past," in Cronon et al (PDF)	Final Project