**Course Description:** The American West has held an enduring fascination in the popular imagination in the United States and abroad, inspiring a remarkably diverse and often contradictory set of visions: howling wilderness and Promised Land, Great American Desert and Garden of the World, wide open spaces and glittering oasis cities. This course explores the myths and realities that have shaped cultural expressions of this beautiful and harsh environment and the diverse peoples who have called it home. Beginning with some of the earliest narratives of frontier adventure and Indian captivity in the trans-Appalachian West, we will examine literary and visual texts that recount a gripping and often tragic history of exploration, conquest, settlement, and exploitation. In the first half of the course we will interrogate the myth of the frontier through the eyes of backwoodsmen, displaced native people, miners striking out for the territories, and women homesteading on the plains. In the second half we turn to the emergence of competing regional visions of the West in the 20th century that produced the romance of Hollywood Westerns, the preservation of national parks and “wilderness” areas, a vibrant literary renaissance in Indian Country, and the rise of an increasingly urban, mobile, and diverse society in the so-called New West. This is a reading-intensive, discussion-based course. Requirements include regular attendance and participation, two short response papers, and two formal essays.

**Required books:** The following texts are available for purchase at the Brandeis University Bookstore. If you buy them from another vendor, please make sure you get these editions. Readings not listed below will be available on the course page on Latte. They are marked “Latte” on the reading schedule.

Course Plan

I Race, Culture, and Captivity on the Frontier

Jan. 13 (W) Welcome and Introduction


Jan. 18 (M) Martin Luther King Day – No Class

Jan. 20 (W) George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians* (1841), Letters 1, 9-12, 15-19 [Latte]


Jan. 27 (W) Wakefield, *Six Weeks in the Sioux Tepees*, pp. 278-313 (finish) [Latte]

Jan. 28 (Th) In-class film: John Ford, *The Searchers* (1956)

Friday, Jan. 29: Response paper #1 due on Latte by 5:00 p.m.

II Mining the Western Myth


Feb. 3 (W) Wheeler, *Deadwood Dick*, chaps. 9-16 (finish) [Latte]

Feb. 4 (Th) Meet in Special Collections

Feb. 8 (M) Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (1872), chaps. 1-8

Feb. 10 (W) Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 9-10, 12-17

Feb. 11 (Th) Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 18-21

Feb. 15-19 Midterm Recess – No Class

Feb. 22 (M) Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 22-30

Feb. 24 (W) Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 31-39
Feb. 25 (Th)  Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 40-43

Feb. 29 (M)  Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 44-48, 52, 54

March 2 (W)  Twain, *Roughing It*, chaps. 55-61

March 3 (Th)  Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) [Latte]

**III Romance and Realism on the Range**

March 7 (M)  Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (1902), chaps. 1-8

March 9 (W)  Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (1902), chaps. 9-16

March 10 (Th)  Wister, *The Virginian*, chaps. 17-21

March 14 (M)  Wister, *The Virginian*, chaps. 22-28

March 16 (W)  Wister, *The Virginian*, chaps. 29-34

March 17 (Th)  Wister, *The Virginian*, chaps. 35-36 (finish)

**Saturday, March 19: Essay #1 due uploaded to Latte by 5:00 p.m.**

March 21 (M)  Wallace Stegner, “Wilderness Letter” (1960) [Latte]
            Stegner, “Thoughts in a Dry Land” (1972) [Latte]
            Stegner, “Living Dry” (1987) [Latte]
            Stegner, “Striking the Rock” (1987) [Latte]

**IV Gender and Community on the Homestead Frontier**


March 24 (Th)  Cather, *O Pioneers!*, Part II, “Neighboring Fields,” chaps. 4-12

March 28 (M)  March Recess – No Class


March 31 (Th)  Cather, *O Pioneers!*, Part V, “Alexandra” (finish)
            Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her* (1984), Prologue [Latte]

**Saturday, April 2: Response paper #2 due uploaded to Latte by 5:00 p.m.**
V The Native American Renaissance


April 6 (W) Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 53-106

April 7 (Th) Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 106-132

April 11 (M) Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 132-79
   Silko, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination” (1986) [Latte]

April 13 (W) Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 180-235

April 14 (Th) Silko, *Ceremony*, pp. 235-262 (finish)

VI The New West

April 18 (M) Larry Watson, *Montana 1948* (1993), Prologue and Part One (pp. xv-43)
   Patricia Nelson Limerick, “What on Earth is the New Western History?” (1990) [Latte]

April 20 (W) Watson, *Montana 1948*, Part Two (pp. 47-93)

April 21 (Th) Brandeis Friday – No Class

April 22-29 Spring Recess – No Class

   Jerome Tharaud, “Housebreaking” (2015) [Latte]

Saturday, May 7: Final Essay due uploaded to Latte by 5:00 p.m.
Course Policies and Requirements

Prerequisites: None

Four-Credit Course (three hours of class-time per week): Success in this 4 credit hour course is based on the expectation that students will spend a minimum of 9 hours of study time per week in preparation for class (readings, papers, discussion sections, preparation for exams, etc.).

Learning goals:

- Improve your ability to close-read and analyze literary and visual texts.
- Develop an understanding of key literary genres, writers, and artists associated with the West.
- Gain knowledge of western geography, the history of its conquest and settlement, and the development of historical approaches to the region, from the Frontier Thesis to the New Western History.
- Practice thinking critically and creatively about the relationship between cultural production and the physical environment.
- Improve your academic writing skills.
- Gain greater appreciation of and enjoyment from works of American literature— including works on this syllabus and beyond it.

Course requirements include:

1. Attendance: Regular and prompt class attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss class because of sickness, religious holidays, or an emergency, please contact me in advance. You will be responsible for posting a response to the readings for the session you missed on the discussion board on Latte within a week. Students who come to class without bringing that day’s assigned readings will be marked absent. Each unexcused absence will lower your attendance and participation grade (20% of the total) by a letter grade. Missing more than three classes will result in failing the class.

2. Active class participation: Participating fully in this class requires completing the assigned readings and participating in class discussion. Reading assigned material carefully and in its entirety before class on the day it is assigned is essential for your success in this class. This is a literature class, and the readings are substantial: you can expect to read between 50 and 100 pages per class period. Please be sure to buy the exact editions listed on the syllabus so we can all refer to the same page numbers, and bring all texts to class in hard copy (bring the book and print out any additional course readings for the day). The majority of our class time will be spent in detailed discussion of these texts as well as the images and films presented in class, so your participation grade includes contributing to class discussion. Every student is expected to speak at least once per class. I may call on you even if you haven’t raised your hand.

3. Response papers: These brief (2-3 pp.) papers account for 20% of your grade. I will provide a prompt intended to jump-start your own thinking about a text. Response papers do not need to be as formal or as polished as essays—I am most interested in your ideas and your thoughtful response to a text. I will grade these on a three-point scale: a check for satisfactory work; a check-minus for work that is sloppy, too short, or turned in late; and a check-plus if you really
wow me. I will make brief written comments to these papers (often some marginal comments and two or three handwritten sentences at the end).

4. **Formal essays:** These longer (5-8 pp.) papers account for more than half of your grade. For our purposes, an essay should make a clear claim (expressed in a thesis statement) and support it with relevant textual evidence. The argument should unfold in a logical, well-organized fashion and be framed by a compelling introduction and conclusion. Formatting guidelines are below.

**Grading breakdown:**
- Attendance: 10%
- In-class participation: 15%
- Response papers: 20%
- Essay #1: 25%
- Essay #2: 30%

**Formatting guidelines:** All papers should be in 11- or 12-point type, double-spaced, using Times New Roman or another standard, readable font, and not in italics. Margins should be 1 inch all around. Any citations should use Chicago style (for a helpful overview see the “Quick Guide” at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html)).

**Late policy:** Papers will be docked a half-grade for each day they are late (e.g., from A to A-).

**Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s ideas or words in your writing without acknowledging the source. It is a serious offense, and may result in failing the class and suspension from the university. When in doubt, see me or consult the student resources listed by Brandeis Library & Technology Services ([https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html](https://lts.brandeis.edu/courses/instruction/academic-integrity/index.html)), including this handout on “How to avoid plagiarism” ([http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html](http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/QPA_plagiarism.html)).

**Writing Center:** Students who want additional help with their writing are encouraged to visit the campus Writing Center ([http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/](http://www.brandeis.edu/writingprogram/writingcenter/); Goldfarb Main Library, Room 107; 781-736-2130; writingcenter@brandeis.edu).

**Electronic devices:** Computers and tablets are allowed during class for taking and reviewing notes only. Browsing the Internet, checking email or Facebook, etc. is not allowed during class; if I find you doing those things I will bar you from bringing your device to future classes. Cell phone and smartphone use during class is prohibited.

**Communications:** Any changes to the syllabus or class schedule, including accommodations for snow days, will be communicated via the class email list and posted on Latte. Please plan to check your university email account and Latte daily to keep informed.

**Disabilities:** If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have a reasonable accommodation made for you in this class, please see me immediately.