



## CULTURE AS HISTORY

Fall 2017 — Spring 2018

### Faculty:

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Credits: 8 per quarter      CRN: 10180

Program meets: 6:00-9:30 pm Wednesday and  
**five** Saturdays: Oct 7, 21; Nov 4, 18 and Dec 2  
from 10:00-5:00 pm

Classroom: Seminar II – room B1105

National myths and cultural icons will provide the lenses through which we examine American history in this year-long program. Students will study works of fiction, film, and history in order to learn how our culture shapes our understanding of past and present realities. Each quarter students will incorporate quantitative methods to enrich and explain aspects of American culture. We'll look at cultural products, from high art to popular culture with a particular focus on film and literature, to see how they reflect and shape our ideas about who and what we are. Our study will be organized around three turbulent decades in American history.

During Fall Quarter, we will consider the post-Civil War decade, to include Reconstruction and western expansion. From dime novels to Hollywood westerns, we'll examine how deeply our identity is shaped by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century frontier ideology. Money and technology—capitalism and the railroads—also drove westward migration. We'll see the tensions around race and class as they figure into films, novels, and popular culture.

Winter quarter, the program will be joined by EWS faculty member Susan Preciso. We will turn our attention to the 1930s. How did the Great Depression and the policy created to deal with that crisis change the way we see government? What was the impact of two great migrations—from the dust bowl states to the West, and from the agricultural South to the industrial north—on American society? In such a time of hardship and deprivation, how did the Golden Age of Hollywood reflect our cultural realities through genre films, such as the screwball comedy, the musical, and the gangster film?

In the spring, we'll focus on the 1950s and '60s and how upward—and outward—mobility informed who and where we are today. The Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War transformed the country. Cars, freeways, and the rise of the suburbs re-shaped the cultural landscape, and television expanded the scope of mass media and popular culture.

Our work will include critical reading of books and films. Students will be expected to learn about schools of cultural criticism, using different approaches to enrich their analyses. They will be expected to participate in seminar, lectures, workshops, and library research and to attend field trips to local museums and live theater performances.

Credits may be awarded in American Studies (literature, art and history) and Geography of the Frontier

### **Questions that will form the basis of our learning goals for Fall Quarter:**

- What is significant about the decade 1865-75 and what are the central lessons to be learned about American culture as history from this period of time?
- The movement west involved many forms of expansion. What were some of these and how have they informed our interpretation of American cultural history?

- How has the Western film genre and other 20<sup>th</sup> century culture shaped our perception of frontier history? What do these films and other art forms—visual, literary and so on—simultaneously reveal about the time they were produced and the time they represent?
- In what ways is *Huckleberry Finn* a commentary on Reconstruction?
- How do the differences between film and literary forms affect the study of historical subjects?

**Program Requirements:**

- Excellent attendance and full participation in all program activities
- Completed writing assignments
- Completed reading notes for each text
- Completed portfolio
- Home screening (access to DVDs for home viewing, such as Netflix, Amazon, etc. recommended)

**Required Books (available for purchase at the Evergreen Bookstore)**

- *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West.* Patricia Limerick 978-0393304978
- *The Frontier in American Culture.* Essays by Limerick and White edited by James Grossman ISBN 978-0520088443
- *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain 978-0393966404
- *Into the West: from Reconstruction to the Final Days of the Frontier* by James McPherson 978-0689865435

**Short Readings and Excerpts May Include:**

- *Slavery By Another Name* by Douglas Blackman
- *Black Reconstruction* by W.E. Du Bois
- “Empire to the West” by Robert Sklar
- “The World the War Made” from *A Short History of Reconstruction* by Eric Foner
- Excerpts from *The Fatal Environment* by Richard Slotkin
- “Women and the Language of Men” by Jane Tompkins
- “Western History,” *Railroaded* and “The Imagined West” by Richard White

**Films will be screened every week, either at home or in class.** Required films and documentaries for at home screening will be placed on reserve in the Library for those students who do not have access to streaming or other options for screening (such as Netflix).

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS will include the following:**

**--Seminar Tickets.** For each scheduled seminar session, please come to class with the following, written in complete sentences, in your best grammatical English, printed on paper and ready to turn in:

-For each text assigned (each article or book excerpt):

- Identify a passage you want to discuss (**and explain why**). Note the page number and paragraph at a minimum--further notes are encouraged.

- For the seminar overall:

- Bring two *specific* questions about the reading(s) that you want to ask your peers in seminar. The best questions will draw multiple readings together, or otherwise drive the conversation towards a deeper understanding and analysis of the texts we have read.

**--Response Papers.** Over the quarter, you will write three brief (3-5 page) essays responding to our readings (not films). Guiding questions will be provided to help you shape the content of your papers.

**--Reading Notes.** We expect you to take detailed notes on your reading all quarter. We may ask to see them on occasion.

**--Responses to film screenings at home or in class.** Films will be on reserve in the library where possible, but use of Netflix, Amazon video or other streaming/DVD service is strongly encouraged. Screening questions will be distributed for you to answer in writing.