

## Myths of the American West

Wednesdays 12:00-14:00 in 119 Main Building or via Webex

Professor Scott Manning Stevens

Office Hours: Tues. 12-1:30pm & by appt.

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### Course Description

The myths surrounding cowboys, Indians, and the American West run deep in the visual and material culture of the United States. Through an exploration of fine art (e.g. paintings, sculptures, and photographs) and popular culture (e.g. advertisements, cartoons, and spectacles like Wild West Shows and World's Fairs), this course will examine how the West was mythologized in order to justify expansion, settlement, and land use. What most Americans believed to be their “manifest destiny” to colonize lands from the eastern seaboard to the Pacific Ocean, Native peoples saw as land theft and an act of imperialism. With this in mind, this course will exam both Native and non-Native representations of the West from the Revolutionary period through the twentieth century in order to understand diverse responses to contact, conquest, and cultural exchange.

### Reading and Required Texts

The “required” readings—which consist of artists’ and critics’ statements, journal articles, and book chapters—are all located online. In order to contribute to class discussions, complete the reading assignments before the date listed on the syllabus.

### Assignments, Exams, and Grading

Record the following dates in your calendar. Plan your schedule accordingly.

**Exams:** The exams will test your comprehension of class lectures, discussions, and readings and will consist of slide identifications of key objects, definitions of key terms, and essays. For all exams, you are responsible for memorizing the artist, title, and date (+/- 5 years) of the works of art highlighted in bold on the daily slide lists. The PowerPoint presentation and slide list from the daily lecture will be posted on Elearning after each class session. You are also responsible for the material covered in your assigned readings, including, but not limited to, general background and historical information. These exams are not cumulative and will only test you on the material covered since the previous exam. No make-up exams will be given. The dates are as follows:

Attendance and Participation (15% of course grade)

**First Exam** (30% of course grade): **Mar. 10**

**Second Exam** (30% of course grade): **May 5**

**Papers:** For all papers, content is as important as your writing skills. You must provide us with a hard copy of all papers. No late papers will be accepted; one-third of a letter grade will be deducted each day after the official deadline.

**Research Paper** (25% of course grade): **May 12**

**Do not hesitate to contact Professor Stevens if you have any questions.**

### **How to Succeed in this Course**

- Attend every class. Not all of the material covered in class can be found in the readings.

- Complete the required readings before lecture to become familiar with the material ahead of time. We will aid you in prioritizing information while taking notes in class.
- It is never too early to start studying for exams.
- Find a system—e.g. flash cards—for organizing course materials starting the first week, and make studying a semester-long habit.
- Spend time reviewing the objects covered in the readings and lectures a couple times a week.
- Work with a partner when studying for exams.
- Be sure you are able to discuss each image's formal qualities and its historical context.
- Become familiar with the vocabulary words introduced in class.
- If you find yourself struggling, meet with Professor Stevens as soon as possible.

## Course and University Policies

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is mandatory and punctuality is expected. More than three “unexcused absences” will result in a 1/3 letter grade deduction from your final grade in the course (e.g. 4 to 3). If you miss more than eight classes, you will be given a failing grade for the course. Arriving more than 20 minutes late to class will be considered an absence. If an emergency arises (personal, medical, family, etc.) that conflicts with an exam, it is only possible to reschedule with written verification from the appropriate Dean and/or your health care provider. Absences will be “excused” with similar documentation.

## The Contested Frontier—The Early Republic to 1850

### **Feb. 10      Introduction: Historical Overview**

Reading: Calloway, Colin, “Images of Invasion” and “Painting the Past: Indians in the Art of an Emerging Nation,” *First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History* (Bedford/St. Marin’s, 2004), 131-136 and 193-198.

### **Feb. 17      The Wilderness and Early Frontiers**

Reading: Cole, Thomas, “Essay on American Scenery,” *American Monthly Magazine* n.s. 1 (January, 1836), reprinted in Sarah Burns and John Davis, eds., *American Art to 1900: A Documentary History* (University of California Press, 2009), 264-271. **Conflict Narratives**  
Reading: Sheardy, Robert, Jr., “The White Woman and the Native Male Body in Vanderlyn’s *Death of Jane McCrea*,” *Journal of American Culture* 22, no.1 (Spring 1999): 93-100.

### **Feb. 24      Indians Coming East**

Reading: Viola, Herman, “Indian Delegations in Arts and Sciences,” *Diplomats in Buckskin: A History of Indian Delegations in Washington City* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 168-189. **Artist Explorers** Reading: Brian Dippie, “The Anatomy of the Vanishing American,” *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (University of Kansas Press, 1982), 12-31.

## Expansion—1850 to the Frontier Thesis

**Mar. 3** **Early Frontiersmen in the West**  
Reading: Troccoli, Joan et al., *Painters and the American West*, Vol. 2 (Yale University Press, 2013). **Manifest Destiny** Reading: Aikin, Roger Cushing, “Paintings of Manifest Destiny: Mapping the Nation,” *American Art* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2000), 78-89.

**Mar. 10** **Civil War and Indian Country**  
Exam One first hour of class. Reading: Stevens, Scott Manning, “Other Homes, Other Fronts: Native America during the Civil War,” *Home Front: Daily Life in the Civil War North* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), 45-70.

**Mar. 17** **The Landscape as Frontier**  
Reading: Hassrick, Peter, “Albert Bierstadt’s Wind River Country” and Kathleen Stuart, “Moran and the British Landscape Tradition,” *Elevating Western American Art* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2012). **The Indians Wars** Reading: Articles about the Indian Wars from *Harper’s Weekly*. They include: “Late Indian Outrages” (July 27, 1867), 468; “Indian War Scenes” (August 17, 1867), cover, 514, 516; and “The Sioux Camp—Scenes and Incidents” and “The Montana Slaughter” (July 22, 1876), 592, 598, 601.

**Mar. 24** **Native Visual Culture**  
Reading: Burke, Christina, “Waniyetu Wówapi: An Introduction to the Lakota Winter Count Tradition,” *The Year the Stars Fell: Lakota Winter Counts at the Smithsonian* (University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 1-11.

**Mar. 31** **The Frontier Thesis and Spectacles of the West**  
Reading: Welch, Christina, “Savagery on Show: The Popular Visual Representations of Native American Peoples and Their Lifeways at the World’s Fairs (1851-1904) and in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (1884-1904),” *Early Popular Visual Culture* (Routledge, 2011), 337-352.

## Nostalgia – The 20<sup>th</sup> Century and Contemporary West

**Apr. 7** **The Nostalgic West**  
Reading: Truettner, William H., “Old West Meets New Art History: Some Reasons Why the Dust Hasn’t Settled” and Angela Miller, “Chasing the Phantom: Cultural Memory in the Image of the West,” *Redrawing Boundaries: Perspectives on Western American Art* (University of Washington Press, 2007). **Imperialist Nostalgia**  
Reading: Rosaldo, Renato, “Imperialist Nostalgia,” *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Beacon Press, 1989), 68-87.

**Apr. 14** **The Commodified West**  
Reading: Rodríguez, Sylvia Art, “Tourism, and Race Relations in Taos: Toward a Sociology of the Art Colony,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 45, no. 1, (Spring, 1989), 77-99. **The Modernist West**

Reading: Corn, Wanda, "Marsden Hartley's Native Amerika," in *Marsden Hartley*, ed. Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser (Yale, 2002), 69-91.

**Apr. 21**

**The West that Hollywood Made**

"Savage Nations: Native Americans and the Western" (pp. 261-290)

Michael Valdez Moses in *The Philosophy of the Western* Ed. Jennifer L. McMahon and B. Steve Csaki.

**Apr. 28**

**Postmodernist West**

Reading: Rader, Dean, "The Cartography of Sovereignty: Jaune Quick-To-See Smith's Map Painting," *Engaged Resistance: American Indian Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI* (University of Texas Press, 2011), 49-71.

**May 5**

**Final exam** during regular class period. Arrange 30-minute meeting with instructor throughout that week to discuss final paper.

**May 12**

Final Paper due