



## English 2350-109: Studies in American Literature Focus: Ideas of “The American West”

Tues/Thurs 9:30-10:45—Sanford Hall 205

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Image at left: John Wayne in *Hondo* (1953)

**Welcome to English 2350**, a study of major works of American Literature. This class carries GEN-ED designations for: *Literary Studies Designation; Historical and Social Perspective (Theme: “This American Life”)*. The purpose of this course syllabus is to provide a quick source of information about what is required of you as a student in this class and will also give you information about what you can expect of me as your instructor. You must have a copy of this syllabus with you in all class meetings so that we can refer back to this document for clarification of information or occasional adjustments to the schedule of classes or readings. Please read over this document carefully. The information contained in this syllabus is contractual—your continued presence and participation in class after receipt of this syllabus indicate your acceptance of the terms outlined within this document. So—what exactly can you expect to take place in this class, and what are the specific work requirements for the semester? Read on!

### General Course Information

What do you think of when you hear the words “the American West”? This term can refer to a physical place—“the” West—but it can also refer to an ideology of American life. Some of the literary pieces we will cover this semester include non-fiction essays, novels, short stories, poems, diaries, and films. Our goal will be to gain an understanding of the historical processes that lead to the formation of an ideology of “the American West” and the themes and trajectories that can be traced within writing from and about the geographical regions invoked by the term. In a practical sense, the American West is perhaps best viewed through the lens of *transformation*. The development of and ideas about the region have been in a state of continual change since the earliest days of European arrival on the American continent. Looking at these foci of change can help us to further understand the writings that derive from and about the region. Some examples of transformations that we will identify this semester are:

- The transformation of the American West from marginalized “wilderness” to site of both national and international importance
- The transformation of ideas about the region from a sense of the American West as a wild, somewhat worthless space to a sense that it is a place rich in opportunities, natural resources and, above all, LAND!
- The transformation of concepts concerning racial and ethnic identity in the U.S., from white dominance to cultural hybridity
- The transformation of ideas about national identity from *Manifest Destiny* to cultural, religious, political, and social diversity
- The transformation back and forth from focus on defining and enforcing the frontier to removing or transgressing borders
- Transformations in ideas of national identity and history
- Transformation of ideas concerning race, class, and gender
- Transformation from conceiving of the West as *place* to conceiving of the West as *ideology*

In other words, we will attempt to step outside of the typical “cowboys and Indians” viewpoint of the American West that dominates much of American culture, so that we can then trace our way through the development of ideas about the West and identify some of its many trajectories—past, present, and future. Naturally, this will all take place through the lens of our various individual cultural backgrounds. It will be our goal this semester to both use our own cultural backgrounds as a useful contrast to the information we encounter in the course and to at times attempt to set aside or look beyond those personal cultural leanings so as to become more open to and aware of cultural settings that are different than—or even in opposition to—our own. We will also explore how one’s personal cultural background relates to decisions made and actions taken, both in the literary pieces covered in the course and in choices within our own lives.

**Required Texts (bring the book currently in use to every class period):**

1. Lyons, Greg. *Literature of the American West*. New York: Longman, 2003. ISBN 0205324614
2. Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 1997. ISBN 9780385486804
3. Austin, Mary. *Cactus Thorn*. Reno: U of Nevada P, 1988. ISBN 9780874172539

**Final Course Grade/Course Credit:**

Discussion Questions	20%
Reading Response Papers (2 page papers; choose 5 out of 10 available topics)	15%
“Reading the West” Journal (must be in an approved bound journal-will discuss in class)	30%
Journal Discussion & class participation	10%
Final Exam	25%

The five grading percentages above will be added together in order to calculate your final course average. **There is no extra credit offered for this course.** All work is due on time and generally cannot be submitted late. Consistent failure to complete and submit assignments may result in failure of the course. When calculating your final grades, I round the numeric average according to the Grading Scale listed below. Hundredths of a point up to .49 will round down, and hundredths of a point from .50 to .99 are rounded up to the next number. For example, 89.43 = 89, while 89.53 = 90. Grades are always final.

**Grading Scale (overall, and for each individual assignment):**

Please note that an A designates exceptional work, a B designates better than average work, and a C identifies average work. Grades are not “given,” they are earned. You should therefore work towards the grading outcome that you desire.

A = 93-100	A - = 90-92	B+ = 87-89	B = 83-86	B - = 80-82	C+ =77-79
C = 73-76	C - = 70-72	D+ = 67-69	D = 63-66	D - = 60-62	F = 0-59

**Assignments:**

Your assignments/responsibilities for the course consist of the following components:

- **Readings:** The reading blocks will constitute the core of our class discussions and form the basis of your written Discussion Questions. You should plan to thoroughly read all assigned material **prior to coming to class** and be prepared to intelligently discuss concepts from those readings. Don’t expect me to carry the conversation in class—student voices will dominate in most class meetings, so your readings are doubly important to your success in the class. If you don’t “get” a reading the first time around—reread it! You will also have occasional critical essays assigned to help further context and understanding.
- **Note-taking:** If I find it important enough to say it or write it on the board—it’s important. Write it down. Students who have previously taken my classes can attest to the fact that these notes are key to a good grade on exams.
- **Active participation in class:** The bulk of our class time will be spent on active discussions of the readings. You will also have films and other in-class activities designed to support the readings. Be prepared, be present, be visible!
- **Discussion Questions:** For each class period for which there is a reading due, you will be responsible for turning in a TYPED list of 4 comprehensive questions pertaining to the readings assigned for that day. These questions should intelligently engage with the concepts, themes, topics, historical connections, cultural contexts, etc. of the day’s readings. Again-if a first reading doesn’t produce ideas, **reread** the selection so that you have a reasonable understanding of the material before you compose your list of **DQ’s**. Note that I will *\*not\** accept hand-written sets of questions or sets that were due on a different day of class.
- **Reading Response (RR) Papers:** Must select five topics from 10 available and complete a short (2 page) response to each topic. Details will be given in a separate handout.
- **Reading Journals:** Details will be given in a separate handout.
- **Journal Discussion:** Details will be given in a separate handout.
- **Final Exam:** Comprehensive short essay/short answer/vocabulary format

**Attendance:**

Attendance at all classes is expected. **Students who accrue more than 5 total absences generally will fail the course.** The first two absences do not carry a grading penalty. Absences beyond 2 (that is, absences 3, 4 and 5) will each carry a 2 point grading penalty off the top of your final course average. Be careful—these add up! I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused

absences—they all count. Therefore, students should not be late to class and should not miss classes. If you must miss a class, contact me as soon as possible to discuss your absence. The best way of contacting me is through e-mail or dropping by my office. You are responsible for finding out about and making up any missed assignments. In-class activities generally may not be made up (please see religious observance policy on page four for an exception). If you are absent on the day an assignment is due, you must arrange to get the work to me **that day**, or it will not be accepted. You may email me a copy of your work, but you must then bring a hard copy to our next class meeting. Failure to do so will result in a 0.

#### **SIGN-IN SHEETS:**

I keep attendance via daily sign-in sheets. It is YOUR responsibility to ensure that you sign in to every class period, regardless of circumstances such as late arrival, sign-in sheets 'passing by' you, forgetting to sign in, etc. I adhere to a strict policy of counting attendance based on these sign-in sheets. If your signature is not on the page—you are absent, regardless if you showed up or not. Also, keep in mind that a late arrival may complicate the sign-in process, as you may forget to sign the sheet in your rush to slip into a seat. I will not allow students to retroactively sign themselves in on an old sheet when the class next meets, so keep up!

#### **Tardiness and Leaving Class:**

Please come to class on time and plan to remain in class for the duration of the class period. Exceptions will be made for students with special circumstances. Students absolutely **may not** leave class simply to take phone calls.

#### **Expectations for Student Behavior:**

In short, pay attention in class, both to the instructor and to classmates who are speaking. Feel free to offer dissenting opinions, but be tactful and respectful of others as you do so. Literary works often bring up many sensitive topics—be prepared to encounter opinions that challenge your own ideas or beliefs, both in the literature and in the responses of your classmates.

#### **Plagiarism/Academic Dishonesty:**

**I have a zero tolerance policy concerning plagiarism and cheating.** Plagiarism and cheating are outlined and defined within the student handbook. It is your responsibility to read through and make sure you understand these policies. Plagiarism is the act of submitting the intellectual work of another as your own. This covers paraphrasing passages from outside sources without citing them, quoting material out of context or so as to make it seem that the author was making points that are in fact not made, and word-for-word direct use of another's words without crediting the author for that material. You should be aware that plagiarism is an Academic Integrity Code offense. Plagiarism carries heavy penalties, such as failing the course. Further, a record of academic dishonesty can potentially affect eligibility for scholarships and other academic honors. Simply put—it just isn't worth it! Do your own work and all will be well. Note that this plagiarism policy applies to all work submitted in class, including your Discussion Questions—do NOT skim online sites to cull your DQ's from. I WILL catch you!

#### **Getting Help:**

Several sources of help are available to you. The first, best help you can give yourself is to read the assigned material at least twice. Often this will clarify information that you perhaps missed on the first read-through. For extra help or for help with writing assignments, you can make an appointment to meet with me or drop by my office to see if I'm available. You can also drop by the University Writing Center (located on the bottom floor of the library), or simply ask for clarification during class.

#### **Important Note about Printing Your Work:**

Successful participation in this course requires that you produce a number of PRINTED documents, such as RR papers and the lists of Discussion Questions. It is absolutely necessary that you have ready access to a word-processing program such as Microsoft Word or similar and a PRINTER! If you do not have your own computer and printer, know that it is YOUR responsibility to use the campus computers/printers IN ADVANCE of any class in which printed work is due. I will NOT accept late work due to printing issues. Don't ask. Obviously, this means it would be a terrible idea to try to print out your work just before class. Regardless of what your printing issues may be, know that I will NOT accept late work, particularly sets of DQ's.

#### **An Important Note about Reading Assignments & Final Exam:**

My exams are not particularly hard for students who have read the assigned material, but they are virtually **impossible** to pass—**AT ALL**—if you have not read the material assigned. I guarantee it. In other words, Sparknotes and the like will never give you enough

information to pass my exams. So do yourself a favor and do your work honestly. You'll be glad you did so when it comes time to take that exam! You should also be aware that I skim those types of sites to ensure that no DQ's have been lifted from such websites—so beware taking the easy route and always write your own questions.

**Email Requirement:**

Last, but not least, I expect all students to check their App email on a DAILY basis in the event that updates and announcements are sent out. Students remain responsible for any adjustments to assignments or schedule regardless whether they check email or not.

**Staples:**

I will never accept an unstapled paper! Invest in an inexpensive stapler—the bookstore has these.

**Disabilities and Special Accommodations:**

If you anticipate accessibility issues related to the format or requirements of the course, please meet with me so we can discuss solutions. If you plan to use reasonable accommodations, you must register with the Office of Disability Services. They are located in Suite 003 in Anne Belk Hall. The phone number for this office is 262-7904.

**The University Writing Center (UWC):**

The University Writing Center (UWC) is located in the lower level of the Belk Library and Information Commons, in room 008 (the long curving suite of rooms located on the same end of the lower level as the information desk and the bank of elevators). The UWC provides you a consultant who will work with you one-on-one. Walk-ins are accepted, but students are advised to make appointments in order to avoid a wait. You can reach the UWC at 262-3144.

**University Policy on Religious Observance:**

You will be allowed two excused absences for religious observances. You are responsible for requesting excused absences for religious observances in writing no later than three weeks after the first class day of the term. For purposes of this policy, the term "religious observances" shall include religious holidays, holy days, or similar observances that require absence from class. You will be afforded the opportunity to make up tests or other work missed due to an excused absence for a religious observance. Specific arrangements to make up work will be made upon receipt of your written request. Requests for excused absences for religious observances will be made on a case-by-case basis. Instructor reserves the right to request documentation to support the student's request for this allowance.

## REVISED Class Schedule (this page replaces same page on original schedule; pg 2 unchanged)

**Note: Unless specifically directed to, NEVER read “Focus on Film” pieces at the end of textbook chapters.**

Schedule subject to change and adjustment, as deemed necessary by instructor. Check your email daily for any changes/updates!

<b>8/24 T</b>	<b>WELCOME TO CLASS!</b>
Introductions/Syllabus/Discussion of semester assignments/expectations Introduction to “The American West”	
<b>TEXTBOOK PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS FOR A WESTERN MYTHOLOGY</b>	
<b>8/26 R</b>	<b>CHAPTER 1: MAPPING THE TERRAIN</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter (Remember—no need to read the “Focus on Film” section at end of chapter!)	
<b>8/31 T</b>	<b>Finish Chapter 1—will have in-class reading time for students still awaiting textbooks</b>
<b>9/02 R</b>	<b>CHAPTER 2: CROSSING FRONTIERS</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter	
<b>9/07 T</b>	<b>CHAPTER 3: WORKING THE LAND</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter <b>EXCEPT</b> for Owen Wister/The Jimmyjohn Boss (95-125)	
<b>9/09 R</b>	<b>CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUAL LANDSCAPES</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter	
<b>TEXTBOOK PART TWO: CHALLENGES TO A WESTERN MYTHOLOGY</b>	
<b>9/14 T</b>	<b>CHAPTER 5: SATIRES AND ENTERTAINMENTS</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter <b>EXCEPT</b> for “The Blue Hotel” (227-255)	
<b>9/16 R</b>	<b>Fall Convocation—No a.m. classes today. Remember that you *will* have classes that start @ 12:30pm onward.</b>
<b>9/21 T</b>	<b>FILM: JOHN FORD’S THE SEARCHERS</b> *Will take every min. of BOTH class periods to complete film—don’t be late!*
<b>9/23 R</b>	<b>FILM: JOHN FORD’S THE SEARCHERS</b> *Will take every min. of BOTH class periods to complete film—don’t be late!*
<b>9/28 T</b>	<b>DISCUSS FILM/SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS</b>
Finish the last bit of the film; Discuss film; will also discuss the 3 or 4 brief readings I handed out to you on 9/09	
<b>9/30 R</b>	<b>CHAPTER 7: NATIVE AMERICAN IMAGES AND VOICES</b>
Reading DUE for today’s class: Read entire chapter. <b>**THIS ONE TIME, ALSO READ THE “FOCUS ON FILM” SECTION AS WELL**</b>	
<b>10/05 T</b>	<b>FILM: SMOKE SIGNALS</b>
<b>10/07 R</b>	<b>FILM: SMOKE SIGNALS</b>
<b>10/12 T</b>	<b>FILM DISCUSSION</b>
Discuss film	

<p><b>10/14 R</b>      <b>CHAPTER 6: WOMEN IN THE WEST</b>  Reading DUE for today's class: Read entire chapter</p>
<p><b>10/19 T</b>      <b>MARY HUNTER AUSTIN</b>  Reading DUE for today's class: Mary Austin's <i>Cactus Thorn</i> (entire book)</p>
<p><b>10/21 R</b>  <b>No Classes today and tomorrow—Fall Break</b></p>
<p><b>10/26 T</b>      <b>NEW WAYS OF THINKING OF THE WEST (handouts)</b>  Reading DUE for today's class: Patricia Nelson Limerick's <i>Closing the Frontier and Opening Western History</i> <b>AND</b> <i>Empire of Innocence</i></p>
<p><b>10/28 R</b>  Documentary: <i>Broken Rainbow</i></p>
<p><b>11/02 T</b>      <b>CHAPTER 8: THE NEW WEST</b>  Reading DUE for today's class: Read entire chapter</p>
<p><b>11/04 R</b>  <i>Into the Wild</i>; pages 2-70</p>
<p><b>11/09 T</b>  <i>Into the Wild</i>; pages 70-132</p>
<p><b>11/11 R</b>  <i>Into the Wild</i>; pages 133-203</p>
<p><b>11/16 T</b>  Film Day 1—<i>Into the Wild</i>    <b>Be on time!! It will take practically every SECOND of class time today and Thursday to finish film.</b></p>
<p><b>11/18 R</b>  Film Day 2—finish <i>Into the Wild</i>    <b>Be on time!! It will take practically every SECOND of class time to finish film.</b></p>
<p><b>11/23 T</b>  Discuss film—<i>Into the Wild</i></p>
<p><b>11/25 R</b>  <b>No class—Thanksgiving Break</b></p>
<p><b>11/30 T</b>  Journal Discussions</p>
<p><b>12/02 R</b>      <b>***Final Class Meeting of Semester. Reading Journals due today!***</b>  Journal Discussions; prepare for exam; turn in reading journals</p>
<p><b>FINAL EXAM: 9-11:30am on Monday, December 13. Exam period is MANDATORY, so plan to be present for this time period. It comes down to this—DID YOU READ THE BOOKS??? Did you take notes? Then you should be fine!</b></p>