Introduction

The purpose of this course is to examine the history of “the West” in the United States. There are two ways in which the West has been described by historians: one group has studied the processes involved in the displacement of indigenous peoples, their replacement by Euro-American immigrants, and the complete incorporation of new territories into the American state; the other has claimed that the West is a place, and should be studied as a region with its own particularities. In this class, we will use both models, and consider the utility of each. Additionally, we must consider the West as the site of so many of America’s founding myths, the legacies of which linger on to this day.

Classroom expectations

All electronic devices, with the exception of translators, are prohibited. That includes laptops.

Readings for the class will be made available on Blackboard. All readings should be read by class time on the day they are listed and a printed copy should be brought to class. Because I have no assigned books that you must purchase for this class, I do not feel it is exceedingly burdensome for you to print out the readings at your own expense.

A significant portion of class time will be devoted discussion of readings. You must be ready to discuss those and participate. Failure to do so will affect your grade.

Grades

30% Quizzes (on the last day of the first three weeks)
25% Paper (due on)
25% Final Exam
20% Participation
Schedule

Week 1
1. Introduction to class; discussion of the “West” as a field
2. Contacts, Conflict, and Columbian exchange
3. Colonial frontiers
4. The West and Revolution

Week 2
1. Jefferson, Madison, and the “empire for liberty”
2. Migrations—Indian Removal and westward settlement
3. The Mexican War and western territories
4. The Civil War and the West

Week 3
1. Dispossession and oppression—Mexican-Americans, Chinese, and the LDS
2. The last Indian wars and the results of conquest
3. Capital’s American West
4. Women and family on the “frontier”

Week 4
1. Populism in the West
2. The “end” of the frontier
3. The imagined West
4. Final Exam