

Environmental Studies/History 015: Frontier Crossings: The Western Experience in American History

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Bowdoin College
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Lecture/discussion times and location: Monday and Wednesday, 2:30-3:55 p.m., 103 Adams Hall
Office hours: 110 Adams Hall, Wednesday, 9-11:25 a.m. and by appointment
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Course web site: <http://blackboard.bowdoin.edu/> (access for enrolled students only)

Course Description

What accounts for the persistence of the “frontier myth” in American history, and why do Americans continue to find the idea so attractive? This course will explore the creation of and disputes over what became the idea of the “frontier” from the 15th century to early twentieth century. Through novels, primary sources, and scholarly essays and books we will explore the rise and fall of the frontier idea over time. Topics will include Euro-American relations with Native Americans; the creation of borders and identities; the effect of nature and ideology; the role of labor and gender in the backcountry; the changing definitions of race and American citizenship; and the enduring influence of frontier imagery in popular culture. Students will write several papers and engage in weekly discussions based upon primary and secondary documents, art, literature, and film. We will also have an exhibition at the Bowdoin Museum of Art in conjunction with this class, which we will use as another resource for research and discussion.

The central purpose of this course is to introduce you to the American West both as a historical topic and history as an intellectual discipline. Along the way, you will improve your ability to think historically and conceptually while broadening your knowledge of American history as viewed from a Western angle. Historical thinking does not come naturally. It is hard, difficult work that includes learning to recognize the complexity, ambiguity, and uncertainty in human affairs; developing a critical eye toward sources of information about the past (and present); and understanding that events occur sequentially and that order matters. Placing events and details in context is a key to thinking historically. Imposing order on the messy, numerous, and diverse information from the past is neither easy nor quickly learned. Thinking historically, then, requires learning details, accounting for discrepancies in sources, placing events in context and applying this knowledge to support your interpretation in a scholarly, persuasive manner.

Readings

There is no text book for the course. I expect students to have a basic grasp of American history, but I will begin each class meeting with a brief overview of the period and themes to be addressed that day. Interested students may want to look at the following recommended readings: Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, The American West: A New Interpretive History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Richard White, “It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A New History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); or Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (New York: Macmillan, 1949, 1952). Copies are on reserve at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library, along with other general books that students might find helpful.

Major readings are available at the Bowdoin Bookstore Textbook Annex, Coles Tower basement, and on two-hour reserve at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library. Additional documents will be on electronic reserve and can be found through the course website or the Bowdoin College Library Gateway. There may be, from time to time, handouts or additions to the course web site to supplement the weekly assignments.

Students should note that while the reading load for this course is substantial, averaging 150-200 pages per week, it is not unreasonable for an intensive beginning college-level history course. I will post reading questions to the class email discussion list one week in advance to help you navigate the materials. You should be prepared to discuss these questions. I have given you page counts for each week so you can plan your schedules accordingly, and I have tried to reduce your reading after holidays and breaks as well. We will also see several short films this term. In accordance with copyright law, these screenings are not open to the public.

Because this a writing-intensive course, I strongly recommend that you purchase the following books:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, A Pocket Guide to Writing History
William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style, 4th ed.

The first book is one of the best primers on writing in American English, and should be part of your collegiate reference library. For those of you planning to major in history, the Rampolla book is an invaluable for history research and writing. Both are available at the Bowdoin Bookstore Textbook Annex or the main Bookstore in the Smith Union.

The following are the required texts for the course

Álvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca, Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America
The Lewis and Clark Expedition: Selections from Journals Arranged by Topic, Gunther Barth, ed.
Gregory H. Nobles, American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquest
Mary Rowlandson, The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Neil Salisbury, ed.
Charles A. Siringo, A Texas Cowboy, or, Fifteen Years on the Hurricane Deck of a Spanish Pony
Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, The Frontier in American Culture
Course readings for History/ES 015 (on electronic reserve)

Course Requirements

The graded assignments include two short primary source analysis papers, one short image analysis paper, and a short research paper. In addition to the assignments listed below, there will be periodic in-class writing and speaking assignments. These will be graded pass/fail, but they are mandatory. All papers must be submitted in person, either in class or at my office. No submissions by email, please.

1. Two primary source analysis papers, 3-4 pages, (30% course grade, 15% each): You will write two thesis-driven papers analyzing two primary source readings this semester:
 - Excerpts from The Lewis and Clark Expedition, due **Friday, October 9, at my office**
 - Image from Bowdoin Museum of Art, due **Friday, November 13, at my office**You have the option to rewrite each paper *once* after I return it to you, with the average of the two counting toward your final grade, but you must resubmit your paper within one week after I return it to you. Revised papers must include the original draft. Details forthcoming.
2. Short research paper, 8-10 pages, due Friday, December 18 at 12 noon, my office (40% course grade): This assignment is your attempt to synthesize the material learned in this course through your own original research. You should select an idea, place, concept or event that shaped or defined the “frontier” and analyze it within the context of Western history. I’ll distribute a list of possible topics and themes during the second week of class. You may wish to use one of the scholarly essays we will read this semester as a model. We will work closely with Ginny Hopcroft, Government Documents Librarian, to help direct your research. There are several deadlines:
 - Library seminar #1 at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library on **Wednesday, September 23**

- Preliminary topic due **Wednesday, September 30**
 - Library seminar #2 at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library on **Wednesday, October 14**
 - Research proposal with preliminary annotated bibliography due **Wednesday, October 14**
 - Library seminar #3 at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library on **Monday, November 23**
 - Complete research paper due **Wednesday, December 1**
 - Discussion of drafts with peer review groups on **Monday, December 6** and **Wednesday, December 8**
 - Revised and final paper due **Friday, December 18 at 12 noon, at my office**
3. Blackboard postings (15% course grade): In order to facilitate discussion, I ask that you post your reactions to the weekly readings on the Blackboard Discussion Board for every reading assignment. Your responses need not be long—a short but thoughtful paragraph will suffice. All postings must adhere to the following guidelines:
- Be posted no later than 12 noon the day that your selected reading assignment is due
 - Clearly identify which reading or readings you are responding to in your comments
 - Be respectful of the material and your peers
4. Class participation (15% course grade): Students are expected to attend all classes and arrive prepared to discuss the readings for that week. Additionally, there will be several in-class writing assignments, ranging from your response to the assigned readings to personal reflections on the course material that will also count toward your participation grade. (These writing assignments will be graded credit/no credit, but they are all mandatory.) Participation, however, is more than speaking up in class. It is also coming to see me during office hours, contributing to Blackboard, and asking questions.

Attendance and Student Responsibilities

It is your responsibility to come to class having done the reading in advance. I will announce changes to the syllabus in class as well as on the website. However, if you are not in class, it is your responsibility to find out about changes or additions. Finally, remember that attendance is a major part of your participation grade. If you do not come to class, you cannot pass the course.

Ultimately, this is your course and I am here to help you make the most of it. One thing that you can do to succeed is to take risks, both during discussion and in your papers. By its very nature, the study of history cuts against received wisdom, undermines cherished assumptions, and erodes stereotypes. Studying history allows us to learn how past circumstances can touch people in the present while giving them a voice to critique political, social, and cultural conditions that shape their lives today. In this class, we will debate the meanings of texts, the judgments of authors, the contexts in which they wrote, and the voices excluded or perspectives ignored. As a result, our discussions about the past may become intense. I look forward to such times; real learning often occurs then. However, you should treat one another with dignity and civility no matter what the situation. I will endeavor to do the same. To repeat, all ideas are open to challenge, even my own, because history is about interpretation and analysis.

Finally, I hope that you will make the time to meet with me outside of class. Getting to know your professors is one of the most rewarding opportunities of attending a school like Bowdoin.

Grading and Late Assignments

I will convert numerical grades to letter grades according to the following system. I will not be applying any scale, and I do not believe in grading on a curve.

94-100=A	87-89=B+	77-79=C+	60-69=D
90-93=A-	80-82=B-	73-76=C	60 and below=F
	83-86=B	70-72=C-	

I will read and comment on late assignments, but all of the papers have clear deadlines and, unless you made arrangements beforehand, late papers will be marked down 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g., B+ to B). **I rarely grant extensions, so please do not ask.**

Citation of Sources

In your written work, when referring to sources (primary or secondary) on which you have drawn, you should provide a complete citation including author, title, publisher, place and date of publication and page numbers. I ask that you use follow the so-called “Chicago-style” for all footnotes or endnotes. Be sure to include a bibliography as well. We will discuss how to assemble proper notes and bibliographies later this term. Good printed reference works for citation include The Chicago Manual of Style and Kate Turabian’s A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. There is also information on the Library Gateway, for quick reference, as well as a link to Sources: Their Use and Acknowledgement, a Dartmouth College publication that Bowdoin has reproduced for its students. The History Department web page lists several relevant sites that explain research methods, citation styles, and plagiarism: <http://academic.bowdoin.edu/history/resources/>. All are available via the course Blackboard page.

Plagiarism and Adherence to the Academic Honor and Social Codes

All students are responsible for reading and heeding the statement on plagiarism, as well as reviewing and following the Academic Honor Code and Social Code, as written in the Bowdoin Student Handbook, 2009-10. Suspected cases of plagiarism will result in a meeting with me, and, if necessary, the Judicial Board. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, you should re-read the Handbook, talk to a college librarian, or ask me in person or by email.

Intercollegiate Athletics and Special Accommodations

Athletics are an important part of Bowdoin. If your participation in intercollegiate athletics compels you to miss class, however, it is **your responsibility** to inform me of your schedule in advance, what work you will miss, and how and when you intend to make up that work.

Some of you may have special accommodations for your learning needs, and I will make every effort to meet them. Nonetheless, even if I have received notification from the Dean of Student Affairs about your situation, it is **your responsibility** to arrange for your needs well in advance of any exam or assignment.

Preliminary Schedule

Please keep this syllabus handy—we will make changes during the semester!

Week 1: Introduction: the frontier idea in American history and culture

What is the frontier idea and how has it shaped American history?

Monday, September 7

None—introductions, in-class writing assignment

Wednesday, September 9

Nobles, American Frontiers, 3-54

Week 2: Points of contact: early European frontiers in the New World

How did the notion of discovery shape the frontier idea?

Monday, September 14

Cabeza de Vaca, Adventures in the Unknown Interior of America, 7-17, 25-140

Wednesday, September 16

Andrés Reséndez, "Introduction" and "Into the Heart of the Continent," from *A Land So Strange: The Epic Journey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 1-10, 157-84

Week 3: Indian-white violence on the early American frontier

How did white-Indian relations shape the frontier idea in early America?

Monday, September 21

Excerpts from Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*

Jill Lepore, "Remembering American Frontiers: King Philip's War and the American Imagination," from *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830* ed. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 327-60

Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 57-96

Wednesday, September 23

**** Library seminar #1—Electronic Classroom, H-L Library Basement, 2:30 sharp!**

Week 4: The frontier as national crucible

What were the nationalistic origins of the frontier idea?

Monday, September 28

The Lewis and Clark Expedition, Gunther Barth ed., maps, 1-25, 45-80, 81-86, 97-114, 123-85, 186-98, 202-15

Wednesday, September 30

**** Preliminary research paper topics due—one copy to instructor, one to Ginny Hopcroft**

Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 99-132

James P. Ronda, "Coboway's Tale: A Story of Power and Places Along the Columbia," from *Power and Place in the North American West* ed. Richard White and John M. Findlay (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 2-22

Week 5: Customs of the country: mountain men, trappers, and voyageurs

How did economic and cultural exchange shape the frontier idea?

Monday, October 5

Francis A. Chardon, *Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834-1839* ed. Annie Heloise Abel; (Pierre, SD, 1932; University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 69-145, 310-17

Michael Lansing, "Plains Indian Women and Interracial Marriage in the Upper Missouri Trade, 1804-1868," *Western Historical Quarterly* 31 (Winter 2000): 413-33

Wednesday, October 7

Nobles, *American Frontiers*, 135-69

Friday, October 9

**** Paper #1 due at my office by 12 noon ****

Week 6: Research paper and Fall Vacation

Monday, October 12

No Class: Fall Vacation

Wednesday, October 14

**** Library seminar #2—Electronic Classroom, H-L Library Basement, 2:30 sharp!
Research proposal with annotated bibliography—one copy to instructor, one to
Ginny Hopcroft**

Week 7: Across the Great Divide: Overlanders, Argonauts, and the Western migration

How did notions of wealth and opportunity shape the frontier idea?

Monday, October 19

Everyone

Nobles, American Frontiers, 173-206

Group A: Argonauts

Excerpts from “‘California as I Saw It!’: First-Person Narratives of California’s Early Years, 1849-1900,” American Memory, Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/cbhtml/>

Group B: Overland Migrants

Excerpts from “Trails to Utah and the Pacific: Diaries and Letters, 1846-1869,” American Memory, Library of Congress
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/upbhtml/overhome.html>

Wednesday, October 21

Group A: Argonauts

Malcolm J. Rohrbough, “Threats from Within, Threats from Without: Fear, Hostility, and Violence in the Gold Rush,” from Days of Gold: The California Gold Rush and the American Nation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 216-29

Group B: Overland Migrants

John Mack Faragher, “Men’s and Women’s Work on the Overland Trail,” from Women and Men on the Overland Trail (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 66-87

Week 8: Cowboys, criminals, and the frontier on horseback

Monday, October 26

How did notions of freedom or lawlessness shape the frontier idea?

Excerpts from Siringo, A Texas Cowboy, pages TBA

Wednesday, October 28

Howard R. Lamar, “The Great Adventure: Charles Siringo and Billy the Kid on the Texas Panhandle Frontier, 1877-1882,” from Charlie Siringo’s West: An Interpretive Biography (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 69-105, with picture gallery

Richard White, “Outlaw Gangs of the Middle Border,” Western Historical Quarterly 12, (October 1981): 387-408

Week 9: The frontier in art and image

How have Americans depicted the frontier idea visually over time?

Monday, November 2

Visit by Rebecca Solnit, freelance writer/scholar and 2009 Santagata Lecturer

Rebecca Solnit, “Lost River,” from River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 101-24, and “Back at the Lake with Two Names, or The Politics of the Place,” from Mark Klett, Rebecca Solnit, and Bryon G. Wolfe, Yosemite in Time: Ice Ages, Tree Clocks, Ghost Rivers (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 96-132

**** Rebecca Solnit, Kenneth V. Santagata Memorial Lecture, 7 p.m., Kresge Auditorium, Visual Arts Center—attendance expected**

Wednesday, November 4

Visit to Bowdoin Museum of Art—meet in the lobby at 2:30 sharp!

William Cronon, “Telling Tales on Canvas: Landscapes of Frontier Change” and Martha A. Sandweiss, “The Public Life of Western Art,” from Discovered Lands, Invented Pasts: Transforming Visions of the American Past (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 89-116, 117-34

Week 10: The frontier as theater and tragedy

How did the frontier idea enter mass consumer culture?

Monday, November 9

Excerpts from William F. “Buffalo Bill” Cody, The Life of Buffalo Bill: or, the Life and Adventures of William F. Cody, as Told by Himself (e-book available via Bowdoin Library Gateway and course reserves)

Excerpts from Colin G. Calloway, ed., Our Hearts Fell to the Ground: Plains Indian Views of How the West Was Lost (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1996), 150-55, 189-95

Wednesday, November 11

Nobles, American Frontiers, 209-42

Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill,” from The Frontier in American Culture, 7-65, plus image folio

Friday, November 13

**** Paper #2 due at my office by 12 noon ****

Week 11: The frontier as open and closed

Why did some see the frontier as closing, and why did others see it reopening?

Monday, November 16

Theodore Roosevelt, “In Cowboy Land,” from An Autobiography (1913) (New York, Penguin Books/Library of America, 2004), 346-84; and The Winning of the West, vol. 1 (New York, London, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1889), 1-29

Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American Culture” (1893), from History, Frontier, and Section: Three Essays by Frederick Jackson Turner (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 59-91

Wednesday, November 18

Richard Slotkin, “The Winning of the West: Theodore Roosevelt’s Frontier Thesis, 1880-1900,” from Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America (New York: Atheneum, 1992), 29-62

Martin Ridge, “The Life of an Idea: The Significance of Frederick Jackson Turner’s Frontier Thesis,” Montana: The Magazine of Western History 40 (Winter 1991): 2-13

Week 12: Research paper and Thanksgiving vacation

Monday, November 23

**** Library seminar #3—Electronic Classroom, H-L Library Basement, 2:30 sharp!**

Wednesday, November 25
NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Vacation

Week 13

Final and last frontiers, or the unending frontier

How and why has the frontier idea endured to the present day?

Monday, November 30

Patricia Nelson Limerick, “The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century,”
from The Frontier in American Culture, 67-102, plus image folio
Nobles, American Frontiers, 243-50

Wednesday, December 1

**** Research paper draft due—bring copies for your peer review group, plus one copy for the instructor, one for Ginny Hopcroft**

Film—“The Searchers” (director, John Ford, 1956)—time and location TBA

Week 14

Conclusions, discuss research papers

Monday, December 6

Discuss research papers in peer review groups

Wednesday, December 8

Finish discussion of research papers, final thoughts, and course evaluations

Possible dinner at Prof. Klinge’s house, Wednesday or Thursday, December 9 or 10

Final research paper due Friday, December 18 at 12 noon at my office