

HIST 1162: *The American West* (Fall 2024) with Prof. Jared Farmer

[NOTE: Partial and provisional syllabus based on a past version of this course; readings and assignments subject to change]

Course description

This lecture course surveys that vast and varied region now known as the American West, and the earlier “wests” that preceded it. The U.S. West contains a distinctive mixture of mountains and deserts; wide-open spaces and sprawling cities; Natives and newcomers. This region functions as an emblematic space in U.S. pop culture and national mythology (think “cowboys and Indians,” Yellowstone and Grand Canyon, Hollywood and Vegas). It also figures prominently in environmental history, political history, and the histories of religion, race, war, and diplomacy. Today, the West is where the United States faces China across the Pacific; and where the republic meets its neighbor Mexico along a 2,000-mile border, only partially walled. From Great Plains Indigenous equestrian innovators in the eighteenth century to Bay Area tech entrepreneurs in the contemporary moment, this course gives the West and all its peoples their due.

Required books

- Hine and Faragher, *Frontiers* (aka “the textbook”)
- Reséndez, *A Land So Strange*
- Graybill, *The Red and the White*
- Okubo, *Citizen 13660*
- Hendricks, *The Wind Doesn't Need a Passport*

Potential elements of grade (most likely no exams; one take-home exam at the most)

- Participation in Canvas discussions and in class
- Book quiz on *A Land So Strange*
- Map quizzes (2)
- Paper on *The Red and the White* and/or *The Wind Doesn't Need a Passport*
- Paper on primary source(s) from the Kislak Center in Van Pelt Library
- Watch a classic western of your choice and write a film review
- Art project

Taking *Citizen 13660* as your inspiration, your assignment is to make something artistic (painting, drawing, cartoon, collage, fabric, mixed-media, sculpture, photograph, video, etc.) that is also quasi-documentary. Imagine that you are a specific historical westerner from the pre-WWII period. Choose a real-life figure who appears in your textbook, and then look up that person in the American National Biography Online database. (If your chosen person does not appear in the database, let me know, and I will help you find a different secondary source.) Your goal is to capture your person’s perspective on western North American history through art. It doesn’t matter whether you are “good” at art. Most people who create artistic things—including most people throughout history—are not artists by profession. You can create a graphic image on your computer (feel free to use AI for assistance, if you think that’s a good idea), or you can scan or digitally photograph a handmade image/object. I would like to project images on the screen in the classroom. To receive credit for this assignment, send me a high-quality image (in a standard format like .jpg) along with a 1-page “curatorial statement” that would be appropriate to put on the wall of an art museum. If you don’t want me to share your work with the whole class, that’s fine; just let me know. If your art doesn’t photograph well, or if it needs to be seen in person, please bring the original to class.