

# West of Everything

## The American Frontier in Literature, Film, Painting, and Photography

Seminar, LV-Nr. 050643 (A+B), 4 CP  
B.A. Anglistik/ Amerikanistik

**Lecturer:** PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt

**Room and time:** GABF 04/413 (Süd), Thursdays 14-16

### Short description:

“To go west, as far west as you can go, west of everything, is to die,” Jane Tompkins writes in her study of the American western. The affinity of the American West to death is not only a result of the cultural history of dispossession and violence that has marked the exploration (or, as one might argue, annexation) of the continent by European settlers. It is also connected to the tremendous urge within the American imagination to reach one’s limits, as Turner has maintained in his famous ‘frontier thesis.’ To go west means to transcend given boundaries and to look for new realms of self-realization and fulfillment. The ‘West’ invokes a whole array of attributes related to the fields of gender (the ‘West’ as a place of masculinization), social theory (the ‘West’ as the epitome of civilization), and national identity (the ‘West’ as a stimulus of cultural belonging). It can stand for all sorts of concepts and promises—progress, adventure, manifest destiny, and individualism, just to mention a few. In other words, the West functions not so much as a ‘real’ territory—marked by the Indian wars and an everyday endeavor to survive in the frontier regions—but rather as an imagined region. A special course reader will encompass works on (and by) renowned writers of the American West (Bret Harte, Hamlin Garland, Mark Twain, and Owen Wister), painters (George Caleb Bingham, Albert Bierstadt, and Frederic Remington) as well as figures of the popular mythology (Theodore Roosevelt, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, and Buffalo Bill).

### Course requirements and grading:

If you are taking this course as a *Seminar*, you have to a.) participate regularly and lively; b.) be part of an expert session (and develop a 1-page handout to be distributed in class); c.) write a final paper ca. 10 pages. Grading: Competent participation in class discussions 1/3; expert session 1/3; final paper 1/3.

If you are taking the course as an *Übung*, you have to a.) participate regularly and lively; b.) be part of an expert session (and develop a 1-page handout to be distributed in class). Grading: Competent participation in class discussions 1/2; expert session 1/2.

Note: In any case, poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your final grade.

**Deadline for Final Papers:** Monday, March 15, 2010. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

### Syllabus:

**22. Oct. Introduction: The American West**

**29. Oct. The Romance of the West in American Painting**

Main texts:

B.J. Wolf, “How the West Was Hung” (1992) (on Albert Bierstadt and other painters of the West),  
J.F. McDermott, *George Caleb Bingham: River Portraitist* (1959) (on George Caleb Bingham).

**05. Nov. Exploring the Unknown Land – The Lewis/Clark Expedition**

Main text (required):

I.H. Eide, original documents by M. Lewis and W. Clark, from: *American Odyssey: The Journey of Lewis and Clark* (1969).

Additional example (optional):

T. Roosevelt, “The Explorers of the Far West” (from: *The Winning of the West*, 1889-1896).

**12. Nov. Closing the Gap – Manifest Destiny, Cultural Politics, and the Transcontinental Railroad**

Main text (required):

John Fiske, “Manifest Destiny” (1885)

Additional text:

John O’Sullivan, “A Divine Destiny for America” (1839).

Additional text (optional):

A.F. Hyde, “Tunnel Vision: The Spectacle of the Transcontinental Railroad, 1850-1869” (1990).

- 19. Nov. The ‘Wicked West’: Prostitutes, Gamblers, and Thieves**  
Main example (required):  
Bret Harte, “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” (1869).
- 26. Nov. Ends and Beginnings: The Disappearance of the Frontier and the Revival of the ‘Old West’**  
Main text (required):  
Frank Norris, “The Frontier Gone At Last” (1902).  
Additional example (optional):  
Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893).
- 03. Dec. Romanticizing the ‘Old West’: The Art of Frederic Remington**  
Main example (required):  
M. Baigell, excerpts and illustrations from: *The Western Art of Frederic Remington* (1976).  
Additional example (optional):  
Owen Wister, “The Evolution of the Cowpuncher” (1895).
- 10. Dec. “If you want to call me that ... smile!” Heroic Vision and the Cult of Masculinity**  
Main example (required):  
*The Virginian* (dir. Stuart Gilmore, 1946); based on Owen Wister’s novel *The Virginian* (1902).  
Additional text (optional):  
Mark Twain, excerpts from: *Roughing It* (1872).
- 17. Dec. The West as a Founding Myth: Daniel Boone**  
Main example (required):  
S.E. White, ch. 1& 2 from *Daniel Boone: Wilderness Scout* (1917).  
Additional example (optional):  
*Daniel Boone* (dir. David Howard, 1936), available on [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).
- 07. Jan. The ‘Old West’ as Performance: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West**  
Main example (required):  
T.B. Peacock, “Preface,” “Buffalo Bill’s Fight with the Indians,” and “Cody’s Buffalo Hunt”  
(from: *Buffalo Bill*, 1921).  
Additional examples (optional):  
J.G. Rosa & R. May, excerpts from *Buffalo Bill and His Wild West* (1989).  
Col. Henry Inman, “Kit Carson’s First Indian” (from: *Tails from the Trail*, 1898. pp. 256-269).
- 14. Jan. The ‘Lonesome Hero’ and the U.S. Postwar Era**  
Main example (required):  
*High Noon* (dir. Fred Zinnemann, 1952).  
Additional example (optional):  
*Shane* (dir. George Stevens, 1952).
- 21. Jan. Deconstructing the West**  
Main example (required):  
*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (dir. John Ford, 1962).  
Additional example (optional):  
*The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956).
- 28. Jan. Re-Interpreting Western Myths**  
Main text (required):  
Annie Proulx, *Brokeback Mountain* (1997).  
Additional material (optional):  
*Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee, 2005).
- 04. Feb. Parodies of the Wild West**  
Main example:  
*Wild Wild West* (dir. Barry Sonnenfeld, 1999).  
Additional example (optional):  
*The Marx Brothers: Go West* (dir. Edward Buzzell, 1940).

Texts are available online at Blackboard! Make sure you have registered at Blackboard to be able to download these materials.

For films, please go to the ‘Mediathek’, GB 03/33 (Nord). The ‘Mediathek’ is open Tue, 11-14, Wed, 12-16, Thur, 12-16. Important note: Films can be checked out only over night (!) or over the weekend. Make sure you return the film the next possible weekday at 12!