INTERPRETING THE AMERICAN WEST

Course Description
In this course students will explore the potential for collaboration between History and the Theater Arts. Students will engage in primary historical research, using archival materials from the history of the American West. From these sources, students will develop a performance piece. Professor Garceau will guide students through the processes of historical interpretation; Professor Ewing will guide students through the processes of dramatic interpretation.

The history of the American West offers a compelling blend of myth, scholarly debate, and evidence that invite further study. “For more than a century,” wrote Richard White, “the American West has been the most strongly imagined section of the United States.” Through oral and written history, songs, fiction, art, and film, the West has been identified with mythic themes of adventure and transformation. Once thought a simple tale of white migration westward, historians now recognize the West as a meeting ground of cultures, a crucible of intertribal diplomacy as well as encounters between Indian nations and EuroAmerican colonizers.

By studying in depth three of the most mythologized forms of migration --the fur trade, the Overland Trail, and the cattle drives-- students can appreciate the complexity of western history and search for its dramatic core. We hope that students will come away with new insight into the processes of storytelling through History and Theater.

Course Structure
Class time will be spent in discussion of the assigned articles, journals, and narratives, as well as in scripting, staging, and acting workshops. Assignments will include written analysis of archival materials, in-class exams, production of scripts, and exploration of acting and directing; all of which will culminate in a dramatic performance.

Course Requirements
1) Consistent attendance and participation. Over two absences will lower your average by a full letter grade.

2) Journal of historical interpretation: Keep a journal of insights drawn from readings and discussion. Identify key issues and larger themes; how does this material change your understanding of the American West?

3) Scripting Folder: Keep a folder of excerpts from the narratives that you have identified as good dramatic material. You may draw from this when scripting your performance piece.

4) Exams: There will be two written exams and two performance exams. The first written exam
will be an in-class essay on the fur trade. The second written exam will be an in-class essay on the Overland Trail. The first performance exam will be a practice piece. The final performance exam will be the dramat-i-a-tic production which develops out of the whole semester’s work.

Required Texts:


Coursepack: This collection of xeroxed articles and documents will be handed out in class. Students pay a lab fee for this packet.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

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<th>W Jan 10</th>
<th>Introduction to the Course</th>
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<tr>
<td>F Jan 12</td>
<td>What’s Theater Got To Do With It?</td>
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<tr>
<td>M Jan 15</td>
<td>NO CLASS. Martin Luther King Day Celebration</td>
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<td>W Jan 17</td>
<td>History, Memory, and Myth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reading: Richard White, &quot;The Imagined West,” <em>Its Your Misfortune and None of My Own; A New History of the American West</em>, pp.613-32.</td>
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<td>Donald Worster, “New West, True West,” pp.21-33.</td>
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<td>Katherine Morrissey, “Engendering the West,” pp.132-44.</td>
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<td>F Jan 19</td>
<td>Oral History Workshop</td>
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<td>M Jan 22</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
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<td>Introduction to the Fur Trade</td>
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W Jan 24  “Many Tender Ties”: The Economics and Politics of Kinship


Frederick Choteau, “Indian Marriage,” p.130.

F Jan 26 Rivalry and Alliance: Doing Business Across Cultures


Edmond Atkin, “Reasons for French Success in the Indian Trade” (1751), pp. 142-44.

LeBorgne, A Crow Chief, "Tell the Hidatsas to Protect and Trade With the Whites” (1805), p.1.

Peter Skene Ogden, “Journal” (1822), pp.386-89.


M Jan 29 Theater Process

W Jan 31 Theater Process

F Feb 2 Theater Process

M Feb 5 Individualism and Community: Revisiting the Mountain Man


Charles Larpenteur, “Narrative” (1835), pp.70-75.

N.J. Wyeth’s Instructions for the Fort Hall Trading Post (1834). pp.177-80.

American Fur Company Papers (1836), pp.943-47


W Feb 7 Unforeseen Legacies: Game Depletion and Epidemic Disease


Lone Dog’s Winter Count (1800-1871), pp.31-36.

Saukamappee, “Memories of War and Smallpox,” (1788), pp.43-7

“I Bring Death: The Kiowas Meet Smallpox” (1839-40), pp.50-3.


* GROUP PRESENTATIONS ASSIGNED *

F Feb 9 Group Presentations

Written Assignment Handed Out

M Feb 12 Theater Process

W Feb 14 Theater Process

Written Assignment Due

F Feb 16 Theater Process

M Feb 19 Introduction to the Overland Trail


W Feb 21  Women’s Experience on the Overland Trail


Lydia Allen Rudd, “Notes By the Wayside En Route to Oregon” (1852), pp.187-98.


F Feb 23  Men’s Experience on the Overland Trail


Jacob Stover, ”The Pinney-Savage Story” (1849), p.291.


M Feb 26  Theater Process

W Feb 28  Theater Process

F March 2  Rehearsal Time

March 3-11  Spring Break

M March 12  Conflict and Morality on the Trail

Reading:  John Reid, “Punishment of Expulsion,” pp.171-79.


Tabitha Brown, “Diary” (1847), pp.52-57.


Addison Pratt, “Diary” (1849), pp.111-12.

Abigail Scott, “Oregon Journal” (1852), pp.143-44.


*GROUP PRESENTATIONS ASSIGNED*

F March 16  Group Presentations

Written Assignment Handed Out

M March 19  Reader’s Theater: Reading the Letters

W March 21  Reader’s Theater: Reading the Letters

**Written Assignment Due**

F March 23  Reader’s Theater: Reading the Letters

M March 26  Introduction to the Cattle Drives


  George Duffield, “Diary” (1862), pp.592-95.


W March 28  Cowboy Culture


F March 30 Indian Cowboys, Female Cowboys, and Black Cowboys


Elise Lloyd & Amy Chubb, Oral History, pp.2-12.


M April 2 Scripting and Rehearsing the Performance Piece

W April 4 Scripting and Rehearsing

F April 6 Scripting and Rehearsing

M April 9 Scripting and Rehearsing

W April 11 Scripting and Rehearsing

April 12-15 Easter Break

M April 16 Scripting and Rehearsing

W April 18 Scripting and Rehearsing

F April 20 Scripting and Rehearsing

M April 23 Scripting and Rehearsing

W April 25 Scripting and Rehearsing

F April 27 Scripting and Rehearsing
Performance, 7pm

Scripting and Rehearsing

Scripting and Rehearsing

Scripting and Rehearsing

Performance, 7pm