

# Visions of the Frontier

## (Re-)Imagining the American West in U.S. Literature and Painting from the Cultural Beginnings to the Early 20th Century

**Course instructor:** PD Dr. Stefan Brandt, Guest Professor

**Course number:** AK 32 106

**Room and Time:** R 201, Thursdays, 10-12 Uhr

**Basic information:** BA Aufbaukurs und PS im Grundstudium, 2 SWS

**Short description:** Throughout U.S. American history, the ›West‹ has been charged with images and concepts that echo the promises of America itself: ›progress,‹ ›adventure,‹ ›manifest destiny,‹ and ›individualism,‹ just to mention a few. During this time, figures such as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, and Buffalo Bill have emerged which epitomize the glories of the ›West‹ and the struggles of American pioneers to establish a new cultural order. Even more than a ›real territory‹ (marked by the Indian wars and the everyday endeavor for survival in the frontier regions), the American West must be regarded as an imagined region. This seminar will examine the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century West as both an ›historical‹ place and an ›imaginary construct.‹ We will delve into the cultural, geographical, iconographic, and mythological background which marks the West as ›typically American.‹ What fascinated – and still fascinates – Americans so much about the ›Golden West?‹ Why is the westward movement so fervently dramatized in key texts of American literature, culture, and painting? Our focus will be placed on affirmative as well as on critical assessments of the American West created by explorers, writers, painters, and politicians. Works to be discussed include writings by Lewis & Clark, Bret Harte, Hamlin Garland, Mark Twain, and Owen Wister. In addition, we will analyze influential paintings by George Caleb Bingham, Albert Bierstadt, and Frederic Remington.

**Reading Material:** It is highly recommended to purchase the course reader with all obligatory texts for the seminar. This reader is available by October 13, 2008, in the copy-shop »Kopierservice« at Königin-Luise-Str. 39; opening hours: Mon-Fri, 8-20, Sat 9-14, Tel 832-6606. Additional texts can be found in Handapparat 29 at the John F. Kennedy-Institute Library.

### Credit requirements:

1. Regular attendance and lively participation in class discussions plus at least 9 entries in the discussion forum on Blackboard (<https://lms.fu-berlin.de/webapps/login/>) (1/3);
2. Oral presentation as part of an expert group (1/3);
3. Final paper (13-15 pages) on a course-related topic (1/3).

**Deadline for Final Papers:**  
Monday, March 2, 2009.  
There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

# Syllabus

- Oct. 16**      **Introduction: The Imagined West and the Real West**  
*Main text:*        Thomas J. Lyon, »Introduction« & »A Western Chronology«, in: *The Literary West* \*  
*Additional texts:* Anne M. Butler & Michael J. Lansing, »Introduction«, in: *The American West*  
Alun Munslow, »Imagining the Nation«, in: *Representing and Imagining America*
- Oct. 23**      **Founding Myths: Daniel Boone, A Hero of the West**  
*Main text:*        John S.C. Abbott, »Daniel Boone, his Parentage and Early Adventures«
- Oct. 30**      **Romanticizing Barbarism: The Indian Wars**  
*Main text:*        Theodore Roosevelt, »The Indian Wars, 1784-87« (from *The Winning of the West*)
- Nov. 6**        **Peaceful Journey? The Meriwether Lewis & William Clark Expedition**  
*Main text:*        Lewis & Clark, Diary Entries (1803-1806), in: *American Odyssey*  
*Additional text:*    Anne M. Butler & Michael J. Lansing, »Inside Native Wests«
- Nov. 13**     **Manifest Destinies: Imagining the West in God's Chosen Country**  
*Main texts:*       John L. O'Sullivan, »A Divine Destiny for America« (1839), John Gast, »American Progress«, and John Fiske, »Manifest Destiny«, in: *Key Concepts...*
- Nov. 20**     **Iconographies of the Westward Movement: George Caleb Bingham**  
*Main text:*        John Francis McDermott, »Life on the Western Rivers, 1848-1851« & paintings  
*Additional text:*    J.F. McDermott, »Daniel Boone – The Political Scene, 1851-1852«
- Nov. 27**     **Fictions of the Frontier: Francis Parkman and the »Great West«**  
*Main text:*        Francis Parkman, »The Frontier«, from *The Oregon Trail* (1849)  
*Additional text:*    E.N. Feltskog, »Editor's Introduction: Francis Parkman and the Great West«
- Dec. 4**       **The Romance of the West: Landscape Painting in the 1860s – Hudson River School**  
*Main text:*        Lee Mitchell, »Bierstadt's Settings, Harte's Plots«
- Dec. 11**     **The Wicked West: Prostitutes and Other Outcasts**  
*Main text:*        Bret Harte, »The Outcasts of Poker Flat« (1869)
- Dec. 18**     **The West as a Tall Tale: Mark Twain and the Western Cultural Imagination**  
*Main text:*        Mark Twain, from *Roughing It* (1872), ch. 1, 2, 5, 40 & 41
- Jan. 8**       **The Wild West as a Show Event: The Example of Buffalo Bill**  
*Main text:*        Joseph G. Rosa & Robin May, »Buffalo Bill and His Wild West«  
*Additional text:*    Jane Tompkins, »At the Buffalo Bill Museum«
- Jan. 15**     **Midwestern Drama: Hamlin Garland and the »Real West«**  
*Main text:*        Hamlin Garland, »Up the Coulé: A Story of Wisconsin« (1891)
- Jan. 22**     **A Myth Is Developed: The Frontier and the »Problem of the West«**  
*Main text:*        Frederick Jackson Turner, »The Problem of the West« (1896)  
*Additional text:*    Frederick J. Turner, »The Significance of the Frontier« (1893, excerpt) & »The West and American Ideals« (1914, excerpt)
- Jan. 29**     **Manliness and Civilization: The Cow-Puncher as a Chivalric Ideal**  
*Main text:*        Owen Wister, »The Evolution of the Cow-Puncher« (1895)  
<http://harpers.org/archive/1895/09/0048971> (original version with images)  
*Additional text:*    Jane Tompkins, »The Virginian – Wister's Mother«
- Feb. 5**       **(Playing) Cowboys and Indians: Frederic Remington and the Old West**  
*Main text:*        Matthew Baigell, *The Western Art of Frederic Remington*
- Feb. 12**     **A Time for Heroes: American Literature after the Vanishing of the Frontier**  
*Main text:*        Frank Norris, »The Frontier Gone At Last« (1902)  
*Additional text:*    Frank Norris, »A Neglected Epic« (1902)

\* All texts are contained in the course reader (available at »Kopierservice«, Königin-Luise-Str. 39).