Comparative American Borderlands

This course will examine U.S.-Canadian, U.S.-Mexican, and Native American borderlands since the 16th century. Even though borderlands are frequently located at the peripheries of empires and nations, they nevertheless shape how centers of national power—cities, national capitals, etc—have defined their relation to issues such as territorial expansion, sovereignty, immigration, labor, community formation, difference, and race and ethnicity. As an explicitly comparative course, we will address themes including legal regimes in the borderlands; inter-American power relations; immigration, citizenship, human rights, and sovereignty; intercultural and racial mixture and conflict; nationalism, transnationalism, and internationalism; openings and closings of borders; and the multiple meanings and locations of borderlands. We will think about the broad and specific applicability of the concept of borderlands, making this course appropriate for graduate students not only in history, but also anthropology, sociology, performance studies, political science, African American studies, and other programs and departments.

Assignments

Attendance and Participation (25%): Beyond Northwestern’s statement that “students are expected to attend all sessions of the courses for which they are registered,” I expect you to do all of the reading and contribute to classroom discussion.

Presentation (25%): During the first week of the quarter, you will sign up in pairs to give a presentation at the beginning of one class session that will set the table for our discussion. The two presenters for a given week’s class meeting will meet with me the day before their presentation—Monday—to discuss the themes and questions they plan to introduce.

Writing Assignments (50%):

1) Weekly Journal (10%): Each week, students will write a one-page journal entry that includes, for example, the main theses of the assigned readings; their situation within borderlands historiography; the other authors that each piece is in conversation with; the primary and secondary sources authors relied on; the location of archives used by authors; the languages authors worked in; and any other observations (i.e.—the who, what, when, where, and why of each assigned reading, as it were). You will submit hard copies of your journals on Tuesday, May 31st.

2) 700-word book reviews (5 x 8% each=40%): During the course of the quarter, students will write 5 scholarly book reviews modeled on the kinds of reviews you would read in the Journal of American History. Book reviews will focus on
assigned books—not articles—and will be due in class on the day we discuss the readings you choose to write about.

3) **Alternative writing assignment (40%)**: Instead of 5 book reviews, you can choose to write a 10-page historiography essay comparing and contrasting 3 books not on our required readings list, or a 15-20-page research paper based on primary sources. As a model for the historiography essay, you can read examples from *Reviews in American History*, or *The New York Review of Books*. An alternative writing assignment, it seems to me, makes most sense if you’re already engaged in a borderlands research project and hope to use this course to help you along your way. Alternative final papers will be due by Tuesday, June 7th.

**Other Notes:**

1) On Saturday, April 2nd, the Newberry Library’s Seminar in Borderlands and Latino Studies will hold its last meeting of the year. It will be a mini-conference that runs from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. While attendance is not required, it would be a good opportunity to learn about new work in the field, participate in discussions about borderlands studies, and meet scholars working in the field. You can find more information here: http://www.newberry.org/scholl/borderlandscurrent.html

2) During Week 9 of the quarter (date TBD), our class will join forces with John Alba Cutler’s graduate seminar in the English Department on “Manifest Destinies.” The purpose of this meeting will be to bring together folks at Northwestern working broadly on borderlands themes to discuss a common set of readings. We will discuss what overlaps and divergences have shaped our understanding of “borderlands” as an interdisciplinary concept.

**Required Texts (in the order they appear on the syllabus)**


Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008)


* Required books are available for purchase at Norris Center Bookstore, but you should feel free to order them online. I will post assigned articles on Blackboard.

**Schedule**

**Week 1: March 29—What is Borderlands History?**

**Assigned Reading:**

1) Johnson and Graybill, *Bridging National Borders in North America*


4) Michael Baud and Willem Van Schendel, “Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands,” *Journal of World History* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 211-242

**Optional Related Materials:**

i) Ramón Gutiérrez and Elliott Young, “Transnationalizing Borderlands History,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 41 (Spring 2010): 27-53


**Week 2: April 5—Spanish American Borderlands**

**Assigned Reading:**

1) Weber, *Barbaros*


Optional Related Materials:


**Week 3: April 12—Native and European Imperial Competitions**

Assigned Reading:

1) Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire*


Optional Related Materials:


**Week 4: April 19—Native Americans and the Shifting Landscapes of Power**

*Assigned Readings:*

1) DeLay, *War of a Thousand Deserts*


*Optional Related Materials:*


iv) Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away* (1991)


**Week 5: April 27—Nation States along the U.S.-Mexican Border**

*Assigned Readings:*

1) Mora, *Border Dilemmas*


*Optional Related Materials:*


x) David Piñera Ramírez, ed., Visión histórica de la frontera norte de México (1987)

xi) Raúl Ramos, Beyond the Alamo: Forging Mexican Ethnicity in San Antonio (2009)


**Week 6: May 3—Nation States along the U.S.-Canadian Border**

**Assigned Readings:**

1) McManus, The Line Which Separates


**Optional Related Materials:**


viii) Bruno Ramirez, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States* (2001)


**Week 7: May 10—The Rise of Border Enforcement**

*Assigned Readings:*

1) Lytle Hernandez, *Migra!


3) Patrick Ettinger, “‘We Sometimes Wonder What They Will Spring On Us Next’: Immigrants and Border Enforcement in the American West, 1882-1930,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 159-81

*Optional Related Materials:*


Week 8: May 17—Distant Borders

Assigned Readings:

1) Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*


Optional Related Materials:


iii) Stuart Banner, *Possessing the Pacific: Land, Settlers, and Indigenous Peoples from Australia to Alaska* (2007)


x) *Sleep Dealer* (2008)

xi) *Sin Nombre* (2009)

---

Week 9: Date TBD—The Proliferation of Borders, on Land and in Mind

Assigned Readings:

1) Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*

2) Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, pp. 1-113

Optional Related Materials:


