

# **COURSE OUTLINE**

## **1. Course Number and Name:** Hist4301, Frontier America

### **Prerequisites**

### **Credits 3**

**2. Course Description:** The Westward expansion of the American frontier has come under severe attack in the academic community as one more example of an “oppressive” aspect of the American experience. Yet much excellent older literature is still widely available that takes a positive view of the overall history of the American frontier. Further, there are many studies of individual themes, locales, topics, and figures, some very recent, which maintain the traditional view. Hist 4301, Frontier America, will focus on these traditional themes by examining the work of Frederick Jackson Turner who “created” the field of frontier history as an academic topic with a celebrated paper in 1893. Historian Walter Prescott Webb, who taught from the 1930s to the 1950s, greatly strengthened the “frontier thesis.” Writings of these scholars are examined in Hist 4301 as well as Ray Allen Billington who further elaborated, in great detail, on Turner’s general thesis.

**3. Course Goals:** The goal of this course is comprehension of the factual aspects of the movement across the U.S. of the dominant social/cultural groups and to study the movement within the academic interpretive framework of Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis.

**4. Course Learning Outcomes:** Students in this course will achieve the following learning outcomes:

1. Describe the academic school established by historian Frederick Jackson Turner (also termed the “Frontier School” of interpretation of US history).
2. Describe contributions to the “Frontier School,” notably by historian Walter Prescott Webb.
3. Formulate how the “Frontier Experience” impacted the overall development of many uniquely American political, cultural, and social institutions, as well as the overall “American character.”
4. Formulate how geographical factors associated with the opening of lands to intense development had economic and other impacts on the growth of the United States.
5. Discuss the impact of the “Frontier” on various aspects of official government policy over the long-term of US history.
6. Discuss critics of the “Frontier School” including critics of the “Safety valve” (a part of the general thesis) as well as critics of the more general thesis.
7. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of the Colonial Period of US history to 1763.

8. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of the Revolutionary Period of US history from 1763 to 1786.
9. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of the Constitutional and Early National Periods of US history, from 1786 to 1830.
10. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of the Period of major territorial expansion, 1831 to 1867.
11. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of the settlement and development of the Great Plains region, including cattle drives and permanent settlement during the Period 1865 to 1890.
12. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of US policy regarding Indians during the period 1820 to 1890.
13. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to events of mining development through US history, focus 1848-1890 but with some events of both earlier and later periods noted.
14. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to selected events of the Period of US history subsequent to 1890 (the end of the “Frontier” as identified by the US Census and endorsed by Turner himself).
15. Apply the “Frontier School” framework of interpretation to a variety of events and developments not noted in prior topics, including the unique case of Utah, as well as the large themes of oil production, water development, railroad construction, and violence.

## 5. Course Concepts

1. “American Exceptionalism”
2. Frederick Jackson Turner; “Frontier Thesis”
3. Walter Prescott Webb
4. Ray Allen Billington
5. “Safety valve”
6. “Individualism”
7. “Self reliance”
8. “Equalitarianism”
9. “Assimilation”
10. “National Identity”
11. Democratic processes
12. “Geographic determinism”
13. “Economic determinism”
14. “Cultural Determinism”

## 6. Required Texts:

Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History*. Online version of Turner lectures as compiled in 1920 available at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner>

Also available online at this site:

[http://books.google.com/books?id=vtF1AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&cd=1&source=gbs\\_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=vtF1AAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&cd=1&source=gbs_ViewAPI#v=onepage&q&f=false)

Billington, Ray Allen (and Ridge, Martin), *Westward Expansion*. University of New Mexico Press, 2001, ISBN: 0826319815. (\$28.00)

Webb, Walter Prescott, *The Great Plains*. University of Nevada Press, March 2003 edition. ISBN: 0874175194. (\$22.00)

## **SYLLABUS**

**Course Number:** Hist4301  
**Course Name:** Frontier America  
**Faculty:** C.W. Miller, Ph.D.

Preliminaries: (Review Announcements)

### **Performance Requirements/Course Grade:**

#### **Assessments:**

##### **Quizzes**

Eight weekly quizzes. Each quiz consists of ten questions for which you will choose the correct answer. Each quiz valued at 3.75% each. (30%)

##### **Discussions**

Contributions to Discussion Topics: Students will choose a topic and wait for your instructor's response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment. (8x5) (40%)

##### **Writing Assignment**

A course essay of not more than 2,500 words valued at (30%). Suggested topics are located in Assignments.

Yorktown University official grade and writing rubrics are located at  
[http://www.yorktownuniversity.edu/new\\_rubrics.cfm](http://www.yorktownuniversity.edu/new_rubrics.cfm)

**Course Participation and assignment submissions:** Students are responsible for participating in the course through the following academic activities: uploading assignments, posting to discussion folders, and responding to faculty inquiries. Students are expected to be involved in ongoing instructional activities based on the recommended schedule for course completion as detailed in the syllabus. In order to actively participate in a course, Students must make contact with their faculty mentor on a regular basis through one of the following methods:

- Posting of an assignment in the assignment area of the course web site (e.g., a paper, project, etc.).

- Posting of an assignment to share with the faculty mentor and other students in the course web site (e.g., a review of a book or article, a proposal for a research study, a presentation in the form of a PowerPoint presentation file, reporting on participation in a research study, etc).
- Participation in a threaded discussion in the course web site (e.g., commenting on a discussion question posted by the faculty mentor, providing feedback to another student, etc.).
- Viewing instructional materials (e.g., a PowerPoint presentation prepared by the faculty mentor, a streaming audio or video presentation, etc.).

### **Academic Integrity**

Available both in the student and faculty handbooks.

## **Recommended schedule for course completion**

**Session 1:** Frederick Jackson Turner’s work is introduced with the general concept of the ‘frontier thesis.’ Turner composed his thesis in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction to the openly racist “germ theory” then prominent in leading academic institutions. Turner recognized the importance of individual leadership within the overall contest of the “frontier thesis.”

### **Assignments**

#### **Required reading:**

Turner, Frederick Jackson, *The Frontier in American History*, Chap. I  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner>

#### **Lecture 1: Located in Lectures/Texts**

Audio: Part 1 (10min)  
 Part 2 (10min)  
 Part 3 (13 min)

**(Required readings** should be completed before listening to lectures.)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor’s response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. Americans in general, and even academic circles, have long noted something called “American Exceptionalism.” How would you define this concept?
2. As Turner said, “General social, economic, political, legal, and other patterns observed in Europe and elsewhere do not seem to apply in America. Indeed, America even seems to go in the reverse direction of other countries and cultures in many ways.” What factors may account for this observation? Can you relate it to your assigned reading for this session?

3. Has America abandoned its exceptional characteristics and adapted principles dominant, for example, in modern Europe? In what sense is there evidence today that some forms of “American Exceptionalism” are still present?

4. The debate between “heredity” and “environment” is well-known today. Yet it was a new concept in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. What factors in your opinion govern human action, heredity or environment? In your opinion, what components make up “environment”?

### Quiz 1

#### Session Outcomes:

4.1

4.2

4.3

**Session 2:** More detail of the “frontier school” is presented. The controversial “safety valve” concept is examined along with other economic issues related to the “frontier thesis.” Other major historians influenced by Turner: Walter Prescott Webb, Ray Allen Billington, and Avery O. Craven.

#### Assignment:

##### Required reading:

Billington, *Westward Expansion*, “Introduction,” pp. 1-12.

Read the 1910 speech of Frederick Jackson Turner located at the Website of the American Historical Association (AHA) at [http://www.historians.org/info/aha\\_history/fjturner.htm](http://www.historians.org/info/aha_history/fjturner.htm)

Next, read the speech of Walter Prescott Webb (1958) [www.historians.org/info/AHA\\_History/wpwebb.htm](http://www.historians.org/info/AHA_History/wpwebb.htm)

#### Lecture 2: Located in Lectures/Texts

Audio: Part 1 (10min)

Part 2 (10min)

Part 3 (10min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor’s response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

Read the speeches by Frederick Jackson Turner and Walter Prescott Webb assigned in this session. Then choose a topic and comment. After you respond to your instructor’s response, choose a second topic and comment.

1. Did Turner inferentially suggest that he had changed his own belief that the frontier had ended as reported by the US Census in 1890? Why is this important?

2. Had Turner revised his view, also inferentially suggested, of American Exceptionalism?

3. Some would argue that Exceptionalism reflects a civil religion and the decline of Christianity in the sense that Christianity is concerned with eternal life. Exceptionalism is concerned with life in America as a New Jerusalem. Is this millennial aspect a part of Turner thesis?

4. Webb simply stated that "I would write history as I saw it from Texas, not as it appeared from some distant center of learning." Should a scholar do anything different? What academic tendencies is Webb aiming his criticism? Discuss.

## Quiz 2

### Session Outcomes:

4.2

4.6

**Session 3:** The "frontier thesis" is applied to settlement and development during the Colonial Period of US history up to 1763. Turner himself called the earliest settlement away from coastal areas "the old west." Many patterns evident throughout U.S. history were already evident: liberal land distribution, assimilation of non English peoples, equalitarianism. Leaders from the region included Thomas Jefferson.

### Assignment:

#### Required reading:

Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chaps. II-III,  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner>

Billington, *Westward Expansion*, ch. 1, pp. 13-44.

### Lecture 3: Located in Lectures/Texts

Audio: Part 1 (30min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor's response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. If you have travelled from the tidewater region of Virginia to the Piedmont region in the same Colony about 1760, what differences would you detect?

2. If you had been a New Englander and had travelled to the Chesapeake about 1760, what differences could you distinguish from your home region?

### Quiz 3

#### Session Outcomes:

4.4

4.7

**Session 4:** The “frontier thesis” is applied to the American Revolutionary Era, 1763-1786. A comparison of British and French policies toward American Indians. The impact of the Frontier in developing the movement that resulted in the Revolution as well as major aspects of the outcome of the Revolution are examined. The Proclamation of 1763, the acquisition of western regions from Britain as part of the final treaty, land distribution, and admission of new states are all related to the “frontier thesis.”

#### Assignment:

##### Required reading:

Billington, *Westward Expansion*, ch. 2, pp. 45-60.

Webb, *Great Plains*, pp. 184-204 (later portion of ch. 5).

#### Lecture 4: Located in Lectures/Texts

Audio: Part 1 (10min)

Part 2 (10min)

Part 3 (10min)

Part 4 (10 min)

Part 5 (10 Min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor’s response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. A major topic in U.S. history is whether the short lived new U.S. government under the Articles of Confederation contributed much of lasting value. Give your evaluation.

2. Can your evaluation be related to the “Frontier thesis” and any impact they had beyond the actual regions of new settlement?

### Quiz 4

#### Session Outcomes

4.4

4.5  
4.8

**Session 5:** The “frontier thesis” is applied to the writing and ratification of the US Constitution and political developments of the new nation then governed by it. These issues include admission of new states, land sales, diplomacy, control of the Mississippi River, and the Louisiana Purchase. Patterns of settlement beyond the Appalachians and into the Great Lakes as well as the Gulf regions in the same period (1787-1830), with further input to democratic institutions and standards.

**Assignment:**

**Required reading:**

Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, chs. IV through IX  
<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/turner>

Go back and review, Billington, *Westward Expansion*, ch. 1.

**Lecture 5: Located in Lectures/Texts** (Lectures 5 & 6 will summarize and synthesize portions of Webb, *The Great Plains*)

Audio: Part 1 (10min)  
Part 2 (10min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor’s response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. The 98<sup>th</sup> meridian has been identified as a kind of “fault line” or “divide” in US geographical, political, and cultural contexts. What differences can be observed historically between the areas on either side of the 98<sup>th</sup> meridian?

2. New states entered the union after the original 13 for more than a century, with two “latecomers” in 1959 and 1960. Pick at least two states admitted at least 10 years apart and from different regions. How did they differ in democratic institutions, political methods, and constitutions.

**Quiz 5**

**Session Outcomes**

4.4  
4.5  
4.9

**Session 6:** The “frontier thesis” applied to the development of Texas as an independent Republic, then as a state of the US, the Mexican War, acquisition of US territories, and acquisition of Alaska. Patterns of settlement with local conditions follow this focus. Finally, the “frontier thesis” is applied to the coming of the Civil War.

**Assignment:****Required reading:**

Billington, *Westward Expansion*, chs. 6-10, pp. 125-236.

Webb, *The Great Plains*, Chapter IX, pp. 385-430.

**Lecture 6: Located in Lectures/Texts**

## Audio:

Texas and Westward Expansion of the U.S.

<http://tinyurl.com/3a9yaub>

(open by holding Control + Shift and Right Click)

Part 1 (10min)

Part 2 (10min)

Part 3 (10min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor's response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. The concept of "Manifest Destiny" was clearly important in the American character of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; Turner himself recognized it. Yet US expansionism had other driving factors as well; identify and discuss.

2. In recent years this charge has been repeated: "The US stole half of Mexico's territory!" Yet shrewd observers in the 1840s, including Sam Houston, recognized that Mexico was bound to lose its northern regions, while he also expected the demise of the U.S. itself with Southern secession. What alternatives to the history of Mexico's northern territory are reasonably viable?

3. If the US had not acquired Western territory from Mexico, could the Civil War then been avoided?

4. Some historians have stated that the Civil War actually began in the mid 1850s with the events known as "Bleeding Kansas." Discuss

**Quiz 6****Session Outcomes**

4.4

4.5

4.10

**Session 7:** The "frontier thesis" applied to Indian policy, including the infamous removals, as well as military action, as a negative aspect. Also, more detail is added on cattle drives and settlement of the Great Plains as aspects of the "frontier thesis."

## **Assignment:**

### **Required Reading:**

Webb, *Great Plains*, Chs. VI-VII, pp. 205-318.

### **Lecture 7: Located in Lectures/Texts**

Audio: Part 1 (10min)  
Part 2 (10min)  
Part 3 (10min)  
Part 4 (10min)

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor's response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. Turner and his followers demonstrated that the "frontier thesis" proved "positive" in developing the US, but even they evaluated some aspects as "negative." What "negative" factors did they identify? Did they overlook any other aspects that also might be seen as "negative?" Discuss the importance of all.
2. If the modern student examines the long-term history of Indian tribes as European settlement progressed across the North American Continent, can any general observations be made about their survival and cultural cohesion as the process went along? Give examples.
3. Recent academic critics, particularly, have attacked Andrew Jackson for the Cherokee removal from Georgia. However, he can make a defense, and scholars in prior generations did so. What are the primary points of his defense?
4. Can the cattle business after the Civil War be described as the absolute epitome of a free market economy? Discuss with examples.

### **Session Outcomes**

4.4  
4.5  
4.11  
4.12

**Session 8:** Mining rushes require some detail of discussion, and had significance long after the "official" end of the frontier (1890). Transportation is important but often overlooked. The final region, the upper Great Plains, reflects specialized considerations of the "frontier thesis" so significant that Webb developed a career that was initially independent of Turner in analyzing unique aspects of this region.

### **Lecture 8: Located in Lectures/Texts**

Audio: Part 1 (10min)  
Part 2 (10min)  
Part 3 (10 min)  
Part 4 (10 min)  
Part 5 (10 min)  
Part 6 (10 min)

**Assignment:**

Required reading:

Webb, *Great Plains*, ch. 11, pp. 485-515

Billington, *Westward Expansion*, chs. 12-13, 16-17 & "Conclusion," pp. 259-298, & 341-390.

**Discussion Topics:** Choose one topic and wait for your instructor's response. Respond to his comment. Choose a second topic and post a comment.

1. The region of the middle of the continent was known as "the great American desert," for generations. How was this image finally overcome? Was the change just a change in perceptions? Or was it a change in geographical reality?

4. Today mining is associated with big business, environmental degradation, and labor issues. Historically, is this valid? Or can mining be associated with the "little man," socio/economic "mobility," and even democratic processes? Give examples.

3. Though it primarily occurred after 1890, the political movement of "free silver" clearly reflected many aspects of the "frontier thesis." Identify several of these aspects. Also, they unified various regions which had somewhat different geographic and economic bases. Discuss.

4. The U.S. Census officially proclaimed the frontier as "over" outside Alaska and a few "isolated" locales as shown by its 1890 count. Turner himself made particular note of this in his celebrated talk in 1893. Yet, were actual conditions in the mining areas much different, say, in 1903? Or even 1933? Discuss the "end of the frontier" in a general sense but also noting mining and any other special cases that may seem interesting.

**Session Outcomes**

4.4  
4.5  
4.11  
4.14