

## F309: Classic Films of the American West -- Outline

National mythmaking about the settlement of the American West developed from a combination of history and storytelling. The typical Hollywood western film depicted pioneers, cowboys, soldiers and others (almost always white and male) taming the wild frontier in the name of progress and civilization. This idealized vision often differed considerably from reality. For example, a significant number of cowboys were black and Hispanic, and nearly thirty percent of the frontier U.S. Cavalry was black. Also, the Westward movement was never as morally straightforward as it seemed. Mirroring trends in the rest of the country, violence, economic exploitation, racism, and sexism were endemic to the settlement of the West.

The goal of this history course is to understand how some classic Western films actually reflect the complex nature of western settlement and contribute to a realistic understanding of the settlement of the West. The unifying focus is the film classics of director John Ford combined with the novels of Elmore Leonard (later made into films), including **The Searchers** and **Hombre**.

The course consists of four feature length films produced from 1956 to 1970. Time permitting, a fifth film may be added at the end. The films were chosen for artistic merit, historical accuracy, realism, and scenic beauty. Due to the length of most of the films and the need for historical background commentary and class discussion, there will be split sessions. Occasionally, class sessions may run 5 to 15 minutes over schedule. There will be no class on Thursday April 24 due to a prior out of town commitment.

Some films were shot in locales similar to those OLLI members will encounter on the June 2014 trip to Zion, Bryce Canyon and Cedar Breaks. They will provide participants who may not have traveled to those areas with scenic background visual experiences, as well as an examination of selected western historical themes, in preparation for the trip.