

Blackfoot History and Culture

(HTST 493, Special Topics in History, Topic 19)

Class Meetings: Mondays from 2:00 to 4:45

Location: SA 109

Instructor:

Professor Ryan Hall

Department of History

Office: SS 608

Email: ryan.hall1@ucalgary.ca

Office hours: Tuesdays, 2:00 to 4:00



Painting by Many Mules, c.1893, McAnally Collection, Royal Alberta Museum

Course Description

Calgary is located within the traditional territory of the Niitsitapi, who are today known as the Blackfoot people. Actually three distinct but closely related nations who call themselves the Kainai, Siksika, and Piikani (Peigan), Blackfoot people have lived on the prairies of what is now Montana and Alberta for centuries, if not millennia. Their continuous centrality to this region's history is the result of profound resilience to dramatic changes. During their long history in this region, Blackfoot people have grappled with epidemic disease, environmental transformation, technological disruption, and the pressures of Canadian and American settler expansion into their homelands. All the while, they have maintained a firm commitment to their cultural and political sovereignty. Portions of southern Alberta and northwest Montana continue to be sovereign Blackfoot territory, although these spaces represent only a portion of their once vast homelands.

This course will examine more than three centuries of Blackfoot history through the works of Blackfoot, Euro-Canadian, and Euro-American scholars. Readings and visiting speakers will reflect the multiplicity of approaches to understanding the Blackfoot past, including oral histories, traditional knowledge, literature, art, archaeology, and archive-based history. Our journey in this class should be both challenging and rewarding, and should make us all look differently at our Alberta homelands.

Course Textbooks

- James Welch, *Fools Crow* (1986)
- Rosalyn LaPier, *Invisible Reality: Storytellers, Storytakers, and the Supernatural World of the Blackfeet* (2017)

Both books are available at the campus bookstore and on reserve at the University Library. All other required readings will be available on the course website.

Assignments and Evaluation

Final grades for the course will be calculated based on the following rubric:

Attendance and Participation	20%
Book Review	20%
Reflection on Site Visit	15%
Museum Object Analysis	15%
Final Group Project	30%

Attendance and Participation

Active participation by every class member is essential to the success of this course. Each student is expected to come to class prepared to discuss the week's assigned readings. I may hold unscheduled quizzes at some point in the semester, but no single quiz will be worth more than 5% of the total course grade.

Book Review Essay

Due: Sept. 26 or Oct. 31

Write a review of one of the two assigned books for the course. What is the argument or intent of the book? Who is its intended audience? What are its primary contributions to our understanding of Blackfoot history, and how does it intersect with the themes we study in this course? How effective is it at representing Blackfoot people? Use these questions as a starting point to guide your essay, which will evaluate the book's overall quality and effectiveness. Reviews should be between 1,000 and 1,500 words long, and students may choose to review either of the two books. Reviews for *Fools Crow* are due September 26, and reviews for *Invisible Reality* are due October 31, by email.

Reflection on Site Visit

Due: Oct. 6

On October 2, we will visit the Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park on the Siksika Reserve, about an hour east of Calgary. This is the site where Crowfoot and other Blackfoot leaders signed Treaty Seven with Canadian officials in 1877, and has been the site of Blackfoot homes for countless generations. The visit will include a tour of the outdoor site, as well as the indoor interpretive center where we will meet with museum curators.

Write a 500 to 1,000-word paper reflecting on our visit to Blackfoot Crossing and submit it by email no later than Friday, October 6. If you cannot join the class for the site visit, contact me to determine other options.

Museum Object Analysis

Due: Nov. 20

Between November 6 and November 20, every student must visit the Glenbow Museum in downtown Calgary on her/his own time. While visiting, every student must locate two objects or

artifacts and complete a questionnaire (to be distributed on Nov. 6), examining their significance. Due in class or by email on November 20.

Final Group Research Project and Presentation

Due: Dec. 4

In groups of three to five, students will select a present-day issue facing Blackfoot communities, prepare a report on the issue, and present on it to our last day of class. More details and potential topics will be distributed during the semester.

Grades for the final project will be calculated in three parts:

- Progress Report (5% of course grade). Groups should submit their research topic, division of labor, and a preliminary list of sources by November 20.
- Written Report (15% of course grade). Each student should submit a written summary of their portion of the research on December 4, numbering between 1,200 and 1,800 words.
- Presentation/Performance (10% of course grade). Each group member will present their portion of research on the final day of class. Individual presentations should be no longer than five minutes.

Course Schedule

Week One: Blackfoot Ways of History

Monday, September 11

- No required reading

Week Two: Ancient Lifeways

Monday, September 18

- Welch, *Fools Crow*, 1-125
- D. Joy Oetelaar and Gerald Oetelaar, “The Structured World of the Niitsitapi: The Landscape as Historical Archive among Hunter-Gatherers of the Northern Plains” (2011)
- OPTIONAL: Hugh Dempsey, “Blackfoot,” from *The Handbook of North American Indians* (2001)
- [In-Class Visit from Professor Gerald and Joy Oetelaar]

Week Three: The Winds of Change

Monday, September 25

- Welch, *Fools Crow*, 126-end

Week Four: Visit to Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park

Monday, October 2

- No required reading

Week Five: The Fur Trade

Monday, October 16

- Ryan Hall, “Before the Medicine Line: Blackfoot Trade Strategy and the Emergence of the Northwest Plains Borderlands, 1818-1846” (2017)
- Excerpt from *The Journal of Alexander Henry the Younger* (1808)
- OPTIONAL: Carolyn Podruchny and Stacy Nation-Knapper, “Fur Trades,” from *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (2016)

Week Six: Treaties

Monday, October 23

- LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, chapters 1-3
- Lame Bull’s Treaty (1855)
- Treaty Seven (1877)
- Sarah Carter, Walter Hildebrandt, Dorothy First Rider, and the Treaty 7 Tribal Council, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (1996), excerpts

Week Seven: Blackfoot Ecology and the Natural World

Monday, October 30

- LaPier, *Invisible Reality*, chapter 4-end
- [In-Class Visit from Professor Rosalyn LaPier]

Week Eight: Blackfoot People, Settlement, and Assimilationism

Monday, November 6

- “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada” (2015), pp. 1-22
- Mark Spence, “Crown of the Continent, Backbone of the World: The American Wilderness Ideal and Blackfeet Exclusion from Glacier National Park” (1996)
- [In-Class Visit to the Nickles Art Gallery]

Week Nine: Cultural Patrimony and the Challenge of Museums

Monday, November 20

- Alison Brown and Laura Peers, “The Blackfoot Shirts Project: ‘Our Ancestors Have Come to Visit’” (2013)
- [In-Class Visit from Joanne Schmidt of the Glenbow Museum]

Week Ten: The Ongoing Fight for Sovereignty and Self-Determination

Monday, November 27

- Woody Kipp, “The Eagles I Fed Who Did Not Love Me” (1994)
- Thomas King, “Borders” (1993)

Week Eleven: Final Group Presentations

Monday, December 4

- No required reading