

Learning New Western History in Asia

—An Approach at 1995 Hong Kong Summer Institute in American Studies—

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アジアで学ぶアメリカ新西部史

—1995香港アメリカ研究夏期研究所での取り組みから—

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要約

1995年7月に4週間にわたって、第一回香港アメリカ研究夏期研究所の講座が香港中文大学で開催された。従来の短期間の国際学会やシンポジウムの枠を越えて、広く東アジア全域から研究者を集め、一ヶ月間アメリカの地域研究に従事させるという研究所の試みは、アメリカ研究にアジアおよびアジア人の視点を導入するという当初の目的を十二分に果た

した。

本論は、この講座に、東アジアの9カ国・地域から招かれた26人のアメリカ研究者の一人として参加した筆者の、研究所での成果をまとめたものである。期間中開催された二つのセミナーのうち、筆者が参加したアメリカ西部史セミナーに焦点を当て、セミナーの目的と内容を記した後、取りあげられた課題ご

とに各章をたて、それぞれの課題での筆者の小論を紹介している。地域研究としてのアメリカ西部は、1980年代から新西部史派と呼ばれる歴史家たちによって、大きく解釈の転機を迎えた。それまで、顧みられることの少なかった先住民族や女性、少数民族グループに焦点をあて、地域史を再構築する試みがセミ

ナーでも積極的に取り上げられた。それぞれの小論はその枠組みの中で書かれたものである。

また、研究所講座の最終日に西部史セミナー参加者全員で、「アメリカ西部再訪」という創作劇の形式にセミナーを総括し、上演したので、そのシナリオを最後に付した。

1. Learning New Western History in Asia

In July 1995, Hong Kong Summer Institute in American Studies was held at the Chinese University in Hong Kong. The Yale-China Association with its headquarters in Connecticut, U.S., is a privately-funded organization which has been engaged in Sino-American cultural exchanges for almost a century. Yale-China, for the first time this year, organized a four-week intensive program in American Studies jointly with the Hong Kong - America Center at the Chinese University. Twenty-six scholars and researchers who are engaged in American Studies were invited from nine countries and areas in East Asia.

The institute offered two seminars; one on the history of the American West and the other on the politics and economics of gender and ethnicity in regions of the U.S. I belonged to the former seminar. Dr. Robert Johnston, Assistant Professor of Yale University, was invited as lecturer of the seminar.

In the 1980s, a group of Yale-educated historians, represented by Prof. Patricia Limerick of the University of Colorado, began to question the view of the American West as a frontier where American democracy and American individualism were born and nurtured. The view was first introduced by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1892 and it had since formed the basis of the study of the history of the American West.

The new group of historians was called the New Western Historians (NWHs). They have attacked the Turnerian school of scholars as ethno-centric since this old school focused primarily on white men and their interpretation of the West as they moved from the East.

Dr. Johnston was a young NWH scholar. By approaching the reality of the West through research on Native Americans, minority groups including Asians, as well as women, who all lived in the West, he tried to deconstruct the myths of the American West. Accordingly, the twelve Asian participants who signed up for his seminar read many articles written by the NWHs and tried to free themselves from the Turnerian view of the West.

The NWHs have attempted to reveal the chaotic West where discriminations, exploitations, numerous failures and disappointments existed side by side with the realization

of the American Dream. For them, focusing on Asian immigrants, who only played a minor role in the old school where the white male was the star of the show, is one of the major agendas in reinterpreting the American West.

The lecturer was likely to give a thought to the fact that the seminar was held in Hong Kong. He put together numerous readings on Chinese immigrants in California. He also assigned us to read part of *Rivers of Empire* written by Donald Worster of the University of Kansas. The book is considered so far one of the most provocative writings by the NWHs. In this book, Worster discussed water management in the American West and its concomitant concentration of power in the federal government and the power elites while comparing that process with the historical model of water management and the concentration of power in China.

All the participants dealt with the problems raised in each class with the Asian point of view and the discussions occasionally even supplemented the views held by the NWHs. On the other hand, different political or economic positions which each country held became clear in the course of the class discussion.

For instance, the atmospheric nuclear tests conducted in the State of Nevada during the Cold War era was taken up in the class. When we were discussing the relationship between national interest represented by the federal government and the rights of local citizens, a woman participant who came from Guangzhou, China, unexpectedly started talking about the incident at Tiananman Square. She stressed that too rapid a democratization would have only led the Chinese people and the country itself into chaos. She startled us by trying to justify what the Chinese Government did to the students and citizens during that incident.

I shared the position held by the NWHs who blame the American greed to have caused the environmental disruptions in the American West and felt very strong about it, as Hokkaido was opened and developed in response to a similar cause and the call of the nation.

Although I felt that environmental issues have a universal appeal in this day and age, NWHs' environmentally-conscious approach did not seem to be convincing enough to the participants from China and Vietnam, both of which are currently experiencing rapid economic development.

Whatever differences we might have had, however, the outcome of the seminar was invaluable. While working on the history of the American West, all the participants became aware of the importance of re-evaluating our own regions and ethnic relations from the viewpoint of the weak, the powerless and the unspoken. To have gained that point of view and to share it with fellow scholars in Asia were reassuring and for me what mattered the most in the seminar.

[Note: This introductory part of the paper is mostly a translation of the article entitled

"Learning New Trends in the Study of the American West in Asia" which I contributed to the Hokkaido Shimbun Culture Column on September 12, 1995.]

2. Seminar on the American West: Objectives, Class Schedule and the Scope of Study

Dr. Robert Johnston stated the objectives of the seminar on the American West as follows:

"The purpose of this course is to provoke critical thinking about the major issues in western history - from Puritanism to peyote, from the frontier to freeways, from John Wayne to genocide. My hope is that the class will represent a lively, contentious, and respectful cross-cultural encounter as we seek out meaning from books, articles, films, art, and each other. Your active and informed participation in these dialogues, as you develop your own distinctive perspectives on the American West, is thus central to the success of the course."

Critical thinking and cross-cultural perspectives were indeed the key of this four-week seminar: All twelve participants - five Taiwanese, three Vietnamese, one Hong Kong Chinese, two Mainland Chinese and myself a Japanese - were always encouraged to think and respond critically and with cross-cultural perspectives to a variety of printed as well as visual media selected by the lecturer.

The first week was spent primarily on joint sessions with the other group which focused on the politics and economics of gender and ethnicity in regions of the U.S. Special sessions with Prof. Paul Lauter, *President of the American Studies Association* of 1995, also provided Asian participants with insights into current status of American Studies in the U.S.

The second week was spent on demythifying popular Western images and myths. The lecturer introduced approaches taken by the NWHs and the political correctness agenda from the controvertial Smithsonian art exhibit "The American West" of 1992. Participants read *The West of the Imagination* (William H. Goetsmann and William N. Goetsmann 1986), and selected chapters from *Major Problems in the History of the American West* (Clyde Milner 1989) so that they were able to familiarize themselves with the battlefield between the old Turnerian school of Western Historians (OWHs) and the NWHs. As I was away from Hong Kong during the second week, my participation and observations which I introduce in the following short chapters were limited to the third and the final weeks of the seminar.

The class met three times a week for the length of three hours. The lecturer assigned each reading to 2-3 people in the class and the people assigned were responsible to lead class discussion by summarizing the content of the reading and providing fellow partici-

pants with leading questions. Some readings were simply to report to class, while major materials were for in-depth discussions. In the meantime, each participant was required to write a one-page essay to hand in to the lecturer at the beginning of each class.

In the following chapters, the content of the class material is briefly introduced, followed by one page essay I wrote in response to the assigned readings. The name which the lecturer gave to each class is used as the chapter title.

3. Beyond John Wayne: Women in the West

After examining the Western myths, and spotlighting the Native Americans and Asian immigrants to the West, particularly the Chinese who went to California in the late 19th century, the class focused on women who lived in the frontier West.

The lecturer selected articles written by women NWHs, which covered the enslaved status of Chinese immigrant women in California (Cheng and Pascoe articles), controversial polygyny practiced by Mormon women (Iversen and Dunfey articles) and a challenging article by Antonia Casteneda with her argument of decolonizing the whole western history.

My paper entitled *Gentle Tamers and "Others"* was written in response to the Casteneda essay. In the paper, I questioned her proposition to radically depart from the traditional approach and to reject the entirety of American history as a colonizing force, while admitting the legitimacy of her argument.

Gentle Tamers and "Others"

Antonia Casteneda's article provides us with a comprehensive framework in which we are able to approach a decolonized West by closely examining the intersections of gender, race, class, culture and sexuality.

I was intrigued by her critique of Jensen and Miller's "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West" and other earlier feminist scholars' works as the history not of women, but of white women in the West. She saw these earlier scholarly works as having remained within the Turnerian tradition and thus reproducing the same relationships of power and authority that male historians used.

I read other assigned essays from a perspective offered by Casteneda. It seems to me that no matter how hard they try to deconstruct the history of the women of the West, they all fail to escape from using white women's values as "the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural others."

Just as the New Western Historians used the Turnerian theory as the foundation of the old school of Western history and thus the target of their attack, the history of

women also needs something which serves as a norm from which scholars can divert and present their cases.

My personal experience tells that an encounter with the history of the white women and the family in the West, which was researched and narrated by Lillian Schlissel, et. al., was truly eye-opening. Although I realized the limited scope of research, mostly from the journals of white Anglo-Saxon middle-class women emigrating from the East, I acknowledge the significance of their achievements in terms of breaking the myths of the West.

Turnerian or otherwise, these earlier works served as the base on which multicultural, intercultural, or international comparative studies have been formed. Casteneda herself attempted an international comparison of frontier women of the 19th century New Zealand and Canada in the article she wrote in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*. I wrote a comment then that the material available for her was also limited to that left by literate middle-class women.

It seems that there is little radical leap or departure in the study of history. You have to build multi-layers of research in order to bring about a structural change. Completely decolonizing and rewriting Western history is no easy task. But at least the direction which Casteneda points at is most relevant, and provides me with an excellent guidepost.

4. The "Real" West? The Manly Arts

The image of the American West as a place where violence is rampant has been persistent throughout the 20th century. Either be it a conflict between the whites and the Native Americans, or between those who have and those who have not, violence was and in large part still is considered to be closely associated with frontier individualism and greed.

Richard White, a historian at the University of Utah, analyzes the social background in which many Americans approved of certain kinds of violence and even came to praise the outlaws as folk heroes. According to White, the outlaw whom he calls the social bandit, is a man who violates the law but who still serves a higher justice. The portrait of the outlaw as a strong man righting his own wrongs and taking his own revenge had a deep appeal to a society concerned with the place of masculinity and masculine virtues in a newly industrialized and rapidly urbanized young country called America.

Assimilated into the classic film genre of the Western, the social bandit becomes the western hero. White argues, however, that the Western is not the simple-minded celebration of the triumph of American virtue over evil but it rather plays on the unresolved contradictions and oppositions of America itself.

In the following paper, I briefly added a Japanese perspective of the American West which was largely acquired through the popular media. Since Western and the outlaw depicted as heroes in the movies have helped building images of America and the Americans abroad, I argued that it would take some time for the foreign audience to understand the significance of the recent attempt such as "Unforgiven" which we watched as part of our seminar program to right the genre's wrongs and to try to show the complex reality which existed in the lawless West and the heroes who were born in that context.

The Outlaw – A Cultural Symbol of America

If you ask Japanese students who take an American culture course at a college level, or any young people for that matter, what imagery or symbols he or she would associate with the United States, answers most likely skew heavily towards things associated with the West, such as cowboys, Grand Canyon, Indians, and Hollywood.

Hollywood and American cinemas indeed have had a profound impact on the image-building of the United States abroad; probably much more profound than Americans might think. After WW II, images of America, its society and people, being conveyed through the American movies and later TV programs were enthusiastically accepted among the Japanese audience as an ideal model for them to follow. Through the Western, a favorite genre of Hollywood cinemas among the Japanese, the history of the American West and the building of the national character were superficially understood with all the wrong assumptions and stereotypes.

Through the assigned readings, I am now able to see why Americans were attracted to the masculine myth of the West and interpretations behind it. Just as the ideology of domesticity tied Victorian women to marriage and family, American men were also bound by the ideology of masculinity, which was at risk when the country "lost" its frontier in the late 19th century and was turned into an industrialized and urban nation.

The outlaws, or what White calls social bandits, who were depicted as American heroes, were born in such a social context. White says that the traits and acts of the outlaw become symbols of the larger, structural oppositions—law and justice, individualism and community, nature and civilization—and that such oppositions were never adequately reconciled in American life.

The significance of the movie "Unforgiven" is that instead of providing the American audience a clearcut substitute of the masculine virtue, it was able to depict the ambivalence and weakness of these outlaws of the 19th century American West.

It will take some time, however, for the popular audience overseas to appreciate the real meaning of a new approach to the genre of the Western made in Hollywood.

5. State Power and Marlboro Culture

After looking at the historical West from new perspectives, the class shifted its focus to the 20th century American West. Here again, the lecturer provoked to unsettle the popular image of the West by providing us with a controvertial book *The American Ground Zero: The Secret Nuclear War* by Carole Gallagher.

The book was about the victims of the radioactive fallout from the atomospheric nuclear tests conducted in the State of Nevada during the Cold War era after WW II. Carole Gallagher, a photojournalist, interviewed over 100 such victims, ranging from the test site workers, veterans, and downwinders in the State of Utah. Her photographs of the victims and their painful accounts of devastating effects of these nuclear testing on their lives astounded the participants. It turned out to be the most emotionally charged moments in this four-week seminar.

As a Japanese, I could not help but compare the experience of these people with that of Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bomb victims. The Vietnamese participants were naturally reminded of the nightmare of the Vietnam War. The Chinese had to ponder upon their pursuit of democracy which ended hazardously at Tiananman Square. The Taiwanese are facing the threat from the mainland on the daily basis. Participants shared the anger toward oppressive state power and the sympathy toward the victimized as the issue has a universail truth, particularly in this part of the world. Such anger and sympathy were present in my paper entitled *Black Rain on Hiroshima, White "Snow" on Utah*.

Black Rain on Hiroshima, White "Snow" on Utah

1995 marks the 50th anniversary of the end of WW II. As August approaches, the Japanese start contemplating on the meaning of the war. On August 6 and 9, the dates when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively, there will be a massive assembly of anti-nuclear groups from all over the world in these cities. We have always had massive rallies in past years, but I expect this year's will be very special because of the anniversary, the French announcement of resuming nuclear testing in the Pacific and of course the controversy over the Smithonian exhibit on the atomic bomb.

We have always been taught that as the only victims of the nuclear warfare in human history, we have to raise our voices against develoment of nuclear arms. "The Japanese are the only victims of the atomic bomb."these words resonated while I was reading through pages of *American Ground Zero*. At the bottom of the Japanese resentment was the suspicion that the U.S. would have never dropped the bomb anywhere else. They did it because they were racist. It was unnecessary in terms of ending the war. This is how the argument goes. However, the documents in the book tell us that the U.S.

shamelessly victimized their own people, powerless people with no information about the horror of the nuclear weapons on their lives.

I was amazed and felt dismayed by the extent of the damage caused by these tests. I felt depressed that the U.S. government learned absolutely no lessons from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They must have had a detailed record of the damage and hazards caused by the radiation on the people long before they started these massive tests. The Japanese were so overwhelmed and muted then and died a silent death under the black rain which fell in Hiroshima right after the bombing and thereafter. The fallout which looked like the "snow" in downwind Utah caused these helpless citizens to suffer a slow, painful death.

This part of the glorified West became nothing but a wasteland with "a low use segment of the population" comprising of Mormons, Indians and the poor. I believe that I am not the only one who sees the arrogance based on the belief that power is justice and the strong can take advantage of the weak and the helpless in the name of promoting national interest.

6. The Modern West

As the last reading assignment, the lecturer selected a most challenging reading from the writings of the NWHs. *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* by Donald Worster has drawn much of the critics' attention for the breadth and the interest of his historical reference.

According to Worster, "The American West is also more consistently, and more decisively, a land of authority and restraint, of class and exploitation, and ultimately of imperial power." He analyzed Karl Wittfogel's studies of Chinese agriculture in depth and attempted to compare his philosophy of its water-power relationship to that in the American West.

The reading naturally provoked interest among Chinese participants. They argued and questioned some of the points raised by the author with respect to water management and the concentration of power among power elites as the fact of life in China of pre-revolution era. While the Chinese were caught up with their own philosophical background, I attempted to compare developmental processes of the island of Hokkaido and the American West within the framework of Worster's theory. I was intrigued by Worster's approach to an alternative future for the posthydraulic West. As it is clear from my paper, I was rather skeptical toward the kind of options he delineated in his concluding chapter, that is, a decentralized, segmented therefore democratic and environmentally-friendly way of life instead of what he calls the authoritative and imperialistic West of the present.

Back to "Pocahontas" – A Future Option for the Posthydraulic West

When I spotted Donald Worster's name in McMurtry's article "How the West Was Won or Lost," his book *Rivers of Empire* was placed at the top of my next reading list. I was intrigued by how Worster was able to interpret water management and the development of the American West in a broader historical context. Among predominantly narrative approaches employed by the New Western Historians, his was supposed to be theoretical, according to McMurtry.

Therefore, when I saw part of the book assigned to the class reading, I was pleased and anxious to start. Now that I have finished reading the excerpt, I completely share McMurtry's reaction to his book. I found his argument of Karl Wittfogel and the Frankfurt School as the founders of critical theory in understanding the relationship between water and the capitalist state fascinating. Worster's application of that theory on the development of the western water empire with its domination over nature and the people of the West was also powerful and I agree with most of what he said about the presence of a megamachine in total control in the highly capitalistic West.

Much of what he said about the domination of government capital and bureaucracy in the development of a newly "acquired" region, in fact, was applicable to the development of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan which came officially under the Meiji Government rule in 1867. The emerald island of Asia with native Ainu inhabitants was brutally altered into a major food supply base of Japan. Under the Hokkaido Development Agency, a national government agency established specifically for the purpose of developing the island, with its extremely able technocrats with the best engineering education in the country, intricate irrigation and hydraulic systems have been introduced and the island has been turned into one of the development wonders of this century.

As I have never seen any books written from a viewpoint offered by Worster about regional development in Japan to date, his highly ideological interpretation is something I should go back and examine. What I am not completely happy with, however, was his conclusion. As I was reading his strong support for Powell's scheme of decentralization, a radical devolution of power and a "Pocahontas" approach to the river as a source of value of its own, I knew I had a *deja vu* of Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*.

I was more startled when I saw the name actually mentioned at the very end of the conclusion. I know that the dichotomy of freedom and democracy and wealth and empire is hard of compromise but is it really an alternative of one or the other? It seems to me that the ecologically-responsive society which Worster proposed was too simplistic a solution to this highly complex postindustrial society. Although some people may believe it is the only way, I do not think it is. As an enormous amount of energy was put into placing the water empire of the West in an historical context, maybe in the next book

he should examine many more alternatives and options for the posthydraulic West.

7. Conclusion

In retrospect, the seminar on the American West at the Hong Kong Summer Institute achieved its goal which the lecturer aimed for at the outset. All participants tried their best to approach critically and cross-culturally to issues presented by Dr. Johnston. The well prepared syllabus, the right amount of readings, lecturer's guidance and encouragement, and participants' willingness to share their thoughts in class all contributed to the successful outcome.

What is the significance of studying the American West in Asia by Asians? I was often asked this in Japan when I came back from Hong Kong. Answers may well be multi-faceted. It could be that it is because Asians played an integral part in the development and the settlement of the American West. Or, it could be that the development model for the American West was in fact identical with the Chinese or the Asian model.

I must stress, however, that the most significant achievement of the seminar was that we all agreed with one thing, that is, we were able to develop a "point of view" as we have acquired distinctive perspectives on the American West. It was a point of view, which cast an eye on the deprived, the powerless, the silent and the weak, including the natural environment. A point of view, which the New Western Historians have tried to incorporate in the American history in a radical way.

On the last day of the Summer Institute, the twelve participants of the American West seminar performed a play in front of the faculty, staff and fellow Asian participants. The play was named *The American West Revisited*. Wesley Y. H. Hsi of National Taiwan University did most of the script writing and Erik Chia-yi Lee of Taiwan National University wrote his monologue. I served as narrator of the play. The play had a clear message that we did understand the difference in approaching the American West by the OWHs and the NWHs. Part I was a depiction of the West by the OWHs and Part II by the NWHs. The draft of the play is attached as an appendix of this paper. It also had a message to the audience that our hearts are with the NWHs.

In rapidly growing and expanding Asia, certain segments of the population are and will likely be left out from prosperity. The rich natural environment is facing a constant threat of devastation throughout Asia. We have to shed light on these who are oppressed in the name of economic development.

That is the point of view I learned as an Asian studying the American West during four weeks in Hong Kong in the summer of 1995.

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Appendix

The American West Revisited

The play is dedicated to our beloved teacher Professor Robert Johnston
and all the faculty and staff of the Summer Institute.

Act 1:

[A group of Indians swarms in, trying to kidnap a white lady.]

The lady: Help! Help!

[A white hero comes to her rescue and shoots all the Indians dead in an instance.]

The hero: Ma'am, are you all right?

The lady: Oh, I guess so. But I was so frightened.

The hero: Don't worry, it is all over now. What is your name, ma'am?

The lady: Clemantine. And you are . . . ?

The hero: My name is George Legstrong Cluster. I'm the cousin of Colonel George
Armstrong Custer, the great rival of Indians. In fact, I'm on my way to join my
cousin to fight the savage Indians.

Clemantine: Oh, Mr. Cluster. You saved my life. You're my hero, how can I thank you?

Cluster: You don't have to thank me. It is a good man's honor to help ladies. Besides,
you see this great land stretching in front of us? We are chosen by God and God
has given us this great continent to build our great nation. This is the Promised
Land, and my sacred mission is to protect our pioneers. I shall not allow the
Indian savages stand in the way of civilization. They are brutal and blood-thirsty,
lurking behind the bushes trying to take our scalps. But I have no fears, and I shall
fight them, and with God on my side, I shall prevail. By the way, ma'am, what is
a beautiful lady like you doing here?

Clemantine: I was on my way to church. Would you like to come with me?

Cluster: I'd really love to, but I'm afraid I can't. You see, I have to move on with the
progression of civilization. I do not have time to stop. And I say to you today,
my friend, that in spite of the savage Indians and the hostile wilderness I still have
a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that
one day this nation will rise up and become the strongest nation in the world. I have
a dream that one day on the Black Hills of the Indian Territory the sons and
daughters of civilized people will live happily together ever after. I have a dream
today, and shall do my best to make that dream come true. So I must move on and
keep fighting for our great country. But I might come back to you someday.

Clemantine: Oh, my hero, I shall wait for you. So long. May God bless you.

Cluster: So long. My darling Clemantine.

Narrator: So Cluster kept fighting the Indian savages. And then in 1876, he was said to have been in Colonel George Armstrong Custer's cavalry when they were ambushed by Indian warriors in the famous battle of Little Big Horn. He was one of the last soldiers surrounding General Custer in his last stand before all of them were slaughtered by Indians. But these brave white men's courage and devotion to the great cause of Manifest Destiny have become part of the great American spirit. And then, in 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Let's welcome Professor Frederick Jackson Turner.

Turner: "That coarseness and strength... that practical, inventive turn of mind... that restless, nervous energy, that dominant individualism... these are traits of the frontier... America has been another name for opportunity... He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased... in spite of environment, and in spite of custom, each frontier did indeed furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape from the bondage of the past; and freshness, and confidence, and scorn of older society, impatience of its restraints and its ideas, and indifference to its lessons, have accompanied the frontier."

Narrator: Although the geographical American frontier was closed before the turn of the century, the spirit of the frontier West has become an integral part of the American Dream, as Professor Donald Worster writes in 1987:

Worster: "My West is the American West: that fabled land where the restless pioneers move ever forward, settling one frontier after another; where the American character becomes self-reliant, democratic, and endlessly eager for the new; where we strip off the garments of civilization and don a rude buckskin shirt; where millions of dejected immigrants gather from around the world to be rejuvenated as Americans, sounding together a manly, wild, barbaric yawp of freedom."

Narrator: So the legend goes on. And the old West lives in the hearts of Americans generations after generations. Some scholars even suggest that the American soldiers fighting in Vietnam, while nominally defending democracy and the free world, were actually refighting the war against savage Indians. The sly, brutal Indians become the foxy, malicious Vietcongs. While the American West seems to expand into outer space, while the Far East is regarded as the Far American West, a different perspective of looking at the American West has gained momentum in the United States in the past decade. People are beginning to see that the Indians might have very good reasons to attack the white men, and that the white men are not so heroic all the time. What is left out in the Grand history of the American West is now brought to light by these so-called New Western Historians...

Act 2:

[A group of Indians sits around a fire.]

The Chief: My fellow Indians, our tribe has lived on this land for thousands of years. But now the white men want our land so that they can have a new way of life. They want to become, but we only want to be. We only want to continue our traditional way of life. We don't want their civilization, because we have our own, and we are happy with it. But we are now seriously outnumbered by the white men, and the time has come when we have to sit down and talk with the white men. So let's welcome the white men's messenger. Welcome, General Showman.

General Showman: Howdy! My government says you must give us your land, but if you sign this treaty, you can live on the reservation we have prepared for you for as long as there are enough buffaloes for you to hunt.

The Chief: We seem to have no choice. Fine, I'll sign, and I pray to the mountains that you will keep your promise. [Both sides sign the treaty.]

General Showman: [leaving the Indians, stops to think:] Good, we got them! Let them have their reservation for a while. But sooner or later, they will have to disappear from our land. These inferior Indians are not fit for this great land. They are dispensable. "As long as there are buffaloes for you to hunt." Fine, we'll kill all your buffaloes so that day will come earlier. And we can make a lot of money with buffalo hides.

[General Showman leaves, immediately returns and breaks into the Indian tent.]

Chief: General Showman?

General Showman: I've come to take your land.

Chief: But what about our treaty? You promised . . .

General Showman: Sorry, this is a democratic country. The majority of our people think you should give us your land, so here I am to take it.

Chief: No, we shall not let you.

General Showman: In that case, [draws his gun and shoots at the Indian. General dies, several Indians die, the chief wounded.]

Chief: Come, my people. There is no hope for peace. They have broken treaties after treaties. They want to destroy our home and our way of life, so let us fight for ourselves and destroy their home. Let's go to war with the white men.

[Indians cheer and dash out of the scene.]

Narrator: The New Historians thus re-examine the Great American myth of the West and tries to face the neglected and often tragic side of the history of the American West. Hence goes an ending note.

[appears Erik.]

Erik:

In 1893, three years after the Wounded Knee Event and about three decades after the completion of the trans-continental railroad, Frederick Jackson Turner presented his famous paper, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." In that essay, Turner rekindled a nationalistic fervor in his American audience and noted that "He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased." The geographical frontier was already over at the time, yet the frontier spirit and the spirit of expansion have stayed on in the Americans' consciousness until today. Almost a century later, a New Western Historian, Richard Drinnon, uses the same sentence of Turner to say something different: "He would indeed be a rash prophet who should assert that the metaphysics of Indian-Hating will be lightly cast aside." Drinnon's statement shows how the New Western Historians think about the Old West. "The expansive character of American life" is nothing less than "the metaphysics of Indian-Hating."

Everyone needs a dream, so do the Americans. But one's dream may become another's nightmare. The frontier experience justifies the American Dream in terms of civilization, progress, and enlightenment. On the flip side, however, is a nightmare of the Indians, the Asians, the blacks, and other minority groups, a nightmare made of racism, genocide, reckless exploitation, colonization, and dehumanization. It is true that the frontier spirit is the core not only of the American Dream, but also of the American national identity. Yet dream is not a coma; and the national identity should not be a false consciousness. What the New Western Historians try to do is to give the American national ego courage and strength to face itself and its historical trauma in order to transcend the past and become mature. This is an extraordinary feat of the national conscience that we should appreciate. Yet the New Historians, like everyone of us, are not only writing history, but also written by history. And facing the historical trauma does not mean a masochistic self-mutilation, or self-devaluation. "History is a vital element in national self-awareness." It is with this "national self-awareness" that the New Western Historians fight their way through.