MDST 3650 Professor William G. Little

Fall 2014 Wilson 204 454 New Cabell Hall

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**Shooting the Western**

The American Western is a popular cultural phenomenon that has mediated the American experience in profoundly influential ways. The genre provides a crucial opportunity to study how national narratives of exceptionalism and frontier exploration are linked to complex engines of ‘progress’: e.g., the promise of democratic rule; the idealization of private property and economic speculation; the development of transformative technologies (like the railroad and the cinema); the belief in America as promised land. Students will examine classic and contemporary Westerns to investigate how these engines have been fueled by a binary logic which privileges one term over another: e.g. human/animal, man/woman, white/native, masculinity/femininity, normality/deviance, purity/impurity, civilization/wilderness. Westerns have frequenly endorsed this logic by framing acts of conquest as stories of redemption, but the genre has also proven remarkably adaptable. This course focuses on numerous complex, revisionary narratives which shoot holes in the myth.