

Beyond the Spaghetti Western [C1]

Jaynie Adams è nata a Tucson, dove vive tuttora e dove conduce una ricerca critica su razza, luogo e appartenenza negli Stati Uniti sud-occidentali . Speak Up l'ha contattata per saperne di più e qui di seguito puoi leggere e ascoltare l'intervista.



Tucson is the largest city in Arizona, a southwestern US state with **dramatic** desert landscapes that are the location for **countless** Westerns. The hugely popular film genre has contributed to what historians call the 'imagined West', an American nostalgia for a premodern lost world, where life was supposedly primitive but also somehow authentic. In fact, as Jaynie Adams, History **Engagement** Coordinator for the Arizona Historical Society explains, the truth about Arizona's past is a lot more interesting than its fictional history. Born in Tucson, Adams still lives in her home city, where she conducts critical research on race, place and **belonging** in the American Southwest. To find out more, Speak Up contacted Adams. We began by asking her about her evolved approach to history. **Jaynie Adams (American accent): **I work with high-school students a lot. And when you work with high-school students, you always get, "Ugh, I hate history, I hate memorising things..." And I'm just like, "Me too". I am not good at memorising things. But

that's not what history is, right? History is interpretation. History is looking at primary [source](#) material and going, "Well, what's the thing that connects these two?" Right? History is like the inter-connective [tissue](#) between [eyewitness accounts](#) or photographs or art or whatever... So because history is interpretive, the way that we understand the past is deeply, deeply impacted by the way that we, as present observers, understand our own world. And I think the West is a really great example of that. **TERRITORIAL CONFLICT** We then asked Adams to take us back to the earliest known human settlements in Arizona. **Jaynie Adams:** The archaeological record suggests that people have been living in this place that we now call Arizona for ten thousand years, at least. Not always consistently, not always continuously, but there has been human activity in this area for at least ten thousand years, and more and more research is coming out of other parts of the Southwest to suggest that people have been living here even longer. The part of Arizona where I'm from, the part in the Sonoran Desert, our ancestral people are the Hohokam people. And they were fabulous at irrigating. So they could move and control the water to irrigate [crops](#) and to support huge, huge settlements. We're talking [about] settlements of a [thousand plus](#) people, which is a lot of people at that time! There's some archaeological evidence of a structure called Casa Grande. **END OF NEW SPAIN** Casa Grande is one of the largest prehistoric structures ever built in North America, but its purpose remains a mystery. Its Spanish name was acquired as, from the 16th century on, a huge portion of what is now the southwest of the US was dominated by a Spanish-controlled territory known as New Spain, which [stretched down](#) into Central America. Then, in 1821, that period ended. **Jaynie Adams:** In 1821, Mexico gets its independence from Spain. So basically the entire western third of what is now the United States up into Canada, that's all part of Mexico. It's a time period that's marked by violence, of course, between settlers and indigenous people. And so this part of the world is part of Mexico until 1848, which is the conclusion of what they call the Mexican-American War. So [in] 1848, Mexico has to cede like a third of its total [landmass](#) to the United States. And that includes most of what we now consider to be Arizona. That doesn't mean, however, that Arizona territory exists as its own thing. Arizona territory is part of New Mexico territory. And what's kind of interesting about the early territorial

period is what is now the Western United States is known to Americans in the capital and on the East Coast, and they're really looking for connection to California, connection to the ocean. **CORRIDORS INTO CALIFORNIA** The American Civil War, between 1861 and 1865, changed both Arizona's [fate](#) and Arizona's shape, as Adams explains. **Jaynie Adams:** So, of course, the civil war happens and the Confederate States of America are the first political organization to recognize Arizona territory as separate from New Mexico territory, but at a different orientation. So instead of the borders of the states being vertical, the border of the state is horizontal. So each state is cut in half essentially, horizontally. And again, it's for [largely](#) strategic purposes. They're looking for corridors into California and beyond. So in 1863, President Lincoln says, "Ugh, you can't have Arizona, you can't have a direct [path](#) to the ocean. We establish our claim on the Arizona territory. We're going to [pass](#) the Arizona Organic Act in 1863." And Arizona na becomes a separate territory from the New Mexico territory. **GOLD AND COPPER** But, says Adams, Arizona's road to [statehood](#) really began when its population exploded after gold was found there. **Jaynie Adams:** Gold is discovered in Arizona in the 1860s, and then in 1870s you have silver, and then the 1880s and 1890s, you have copper. So you have [folks](#) coming to Arizona territory [largely](#) single white men who are working in the mines or working in [hospitality](#) or mining logistics... things like that. And then as the mines start [to take off](#) and as you get these [boomtowns](#) that are so iconic in the American West, you see increasing migrations of people from the American South and from the East Coast moving into Arizona territory. And of course, that is creating some uncomfortable relationships with indigenous people, particularly with different groups of Apache people. That conflict kind of [comes to a head](#) in the 1880s and 1890s with, very famously, Geronimo. But the campaign against Geronimo comes to a [swift](#) end. In 1880 the railroad is completed through Arizona. And not only can you move goods and people and ideas, but you can also mobilize troops very, very quickly. And then in 1912, Arizona gets [statehood](#). **FICTIONAL LANDSCAPES** Arizona's imagined history was consolidated by a boom in TV and film Westerns from the 1940s through the 1960s – and beyond. The hit 1993 movie Tombstone is a typically stereotyped example, says Adams. **Jaynie Adams:** Arizona's history is particularly complicated, I think in large part

because of the fantasies that have been created around the American West. All of the television shows, all of the movies from the 40s, 50s and 60s, really kind of [depict](#) a West that never really existed. It creates in people's minds this vision of, you know, the cowboy on the white horse coming in and saving the day. And things were much more complicated. I think a really great example is Wyatt Earp. Everyone knows Wyatt Earp from the Tombstone film as this great [lawman](#) and a [champion](#) of justice and peace and all of those things. But some experts say Wyatt Earp was just another [grifter](#), and he was moving from one [scam](#) to the next. So it's interesting how you have the mythology that gets [blown out of proportion](#), and when that mythology gets [blown out of proportion](#), you do miss those other stories. And they are just as important to understanding why things are the way that they are.

Glossary

- **eyewitness accounts** = eyewitness accounts
- **crops** = coltivazioni
- **pass** = approvare
- **folks** = gente
- **largely** = condizione di Stato
- **hospitality** = hospitality
- **countless** = countless
- **depict** = descrivere
- **blown out of proportion** = ingigantire
- **dramatic** = spettacolari
- **source** = fonte primaria
- **tissue** = tessuto
- **landmass** = estensione territoriale
- **lawman** = rappresentante della legge
- **thousand plus** = più di mille
- **statehood** = condizione di Stato
- **champion** = difensore
- **belonging** = senso di appartenenza
- **to take off** = decollar
- **boomtowns** = città in espansione, fiorenti
- **Engagement** = Engagement
- **fate** = fate
- **swift** = rapida
- **stretched down** = estendersi verso il basso
- **path** = accesso
- **comes to a head** = giungere al culmine
- **scam** = truffa
- **grifter** = imbrogliatore