

# INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION IN NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES



## RELIGION 2004

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<b>INSTRUCTOR'S WEBPAGE</b>	<a href="http://kirkland.myweb.uga.edu">HTTP://KIRKLAND.MYWEB.UGA.EDU</a>
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*"Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."*

— **WILLIAM JAMES** (1842-1910), *THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE* (1902)



### COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To illumine the hermeneutical issues inherent in understanding religion across cultures.
2. To introduce certain common aspects of traditional Native American life by examining elements of a variety of Native societies.
3. To demonstrate the diverse factors that affect human life by observing the influence of disparate historic, geographic, and economic factors on Native beliefs and practices.
4. To challenge simplistic modern notions that religion is merely a matter of "personal belief," by exploring the Native emphases upon the ritual and social dimensions of religion that moderns generally discount.
5. To understand the tremendous impact of the arrival of Europeans and Americans upon the evolution of religion in Native American cultures.
6. To combat common stereotypes about Native Americans, and the widespread exploitation of Native beliefs and practices.

The academic study of religion is a systematic exploration of the visions, values, and activities by which people of past and present have understood and shaped their life-experiences. Such courses are designed to promote a mature sensitivity to the world's religious traditions, within their proper social and historical contexts. Such courses are not intended to steer you toward, or away from, any particular tradition. Nor are they intended to facilitate any spiritual search in which you might be personally engaged. Rather, the goals of this course are for you (1) to achieve an accurate understanding of certain societies' religions on those societies' own terms, and for you (2) to learn to assess those societies' religions in a manner that is both properly critical and properly sympathetic.

This course will explore the practice of religion in selected regions of North America, past and present. That is, we will seek insight into the ways in which specific native societies have understood the world, and how members of those societies have taken part in the world so as to most fully experience life's true meaning.

Naturally, we cannot study all native American cultures in one course. Our explorations will encompass some cultures that flourish today (such as the Navajo, the Hopi, and Lakota “Sioux”); some that were decimated long ago, yet endure (such as the Ohlone of California, and certain Southeastern peoples); and some that survived largely intact, but seldom noticed by outsiders (such as the Athabaskan “Koyukon” of Alaska). We will examine both (1) the ways in which religion was practiced in those societies before the transformations wrought by the political, economic, and cultural impact of Euro-American society; and (2) the religious consequences of that impact. Though some of the material that we study will derive from the work of anthropologists, our primary approach will be historical.

In addition, be aware that this course is **not** “**about you**”: you are in this course to study the visions and values of people who are socially, historically, linguistically, and culturally **other** than you and I are. If you wish to “find yourself,” to “deepen your spirituality,” or “become closer to the earth,” you are in the wrong place. In America (and even Europe!) today, native traditions have often been profitably marketed to today’s “**wannabes**”—members of the dominant (non-native) society, who feel rootless because they have, in recent centuries, been taught to reject their own ancestral traditions as “**oppressive**”—mostly because those traditions teach (1) that life’s actual meaning and value inherently derive from somewhere other than “**myself**,” and (2) that we have responsibilities to others (both in the community into which we were actually born, and to beings of orders of reality other than our own), which outweigh our **own individual feelings and desires**, especially the denial of what those before us, in our own cultural traditions, have believed and practiced. Such “seekers” are not only qualitatively “other” than Native Americans: they are the exact opposite!

In this course, you will learn nothing about the commercial products fraudulently labelled as “Native American Spirituality”—very recent creations that have been deceptively presented to credulous non-Natives as ancient remnants of “a world of timeless spirituality” into which anyone can step at any time, for any reason—and without any personal sacrifice (other, of course, than some money!). Some presentations of “Native American Spirituality” are unauthorized reworkings of authentic sacred tribal traditions by self-appointed “spiritual leaders” who may have some “blood” or personal experience in a native community, but who have no legitimate qualifications, or authority, to teach such things—and certainly no mandate to teach those sacred traditions to outsiders. Responsible native spokespeople have often denounced such activities as “cultural theft.” Meanwhile, other brands of the commercial product labelled “Native American Spirituality” are really whole-cloth creations of pseudo-Indians—whites who falsely claim to be natives—who narcissistically seek fame and fortune by literally selling their own personal creations to gullible “seekers” of meaning in the “rootless” dominant society.

This course is designed to demonstrate the vast distance—and often, the inherent contradictions—between the authentic traditions of native American peoples (to the extent that we may truly be able to know them) from the products and services marketed to Wannabes by “the Culture Vultures.” Our goal in this course is to learn how to understand the lives of people of other ages and cultures, **not** to try to **become** those people—and certainly not to exploit surviving elements of those people’s sacred traditions or to buy into fraudulent merchandise like “Native American Spirituality” designed to satisfy the “wannabe” lust among non-natives.



## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

This syllabus is simply a general plan for the course. Changes and variations, as announced to the class by the instructor, may be necessary at times.

You are responsible for **learning** the contents of this syllabus, and for **abiding by** its prescrip-

tions and proscriptions.

All academic work must meet the standards contained in the document titled *A Culture of Honesty*. All students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

You are expected to **take thorough notes** in class. If, because of illness, etc., you happen to miss class, it is **your responsibility** to check with classmates about what you missed—**not** to expect the instructor to give you a personal review or to excuse you for not having paid attention to important announcements. Do not, for instance, e-mail the instructor and ask “what are we supposed to be reading?”

There are only 19 days of class in this term, so your **ATTENDANCE each class day** is **essential**. If you finish the course with 3 or fewer unexcused absences, your attendance will have a marginal effect on your course grade. If you finish the course with 4 or more unexcused absences, your course grade will be reduced in proportion to the number of your absences.

The midpoint withdrawal deadline for this term is Thursday, June 18. A student who submits assigned work before that date, then withdraws from the course, will receive a W or a WF **based on that work**. A student who withdraws before submitting assigned work will receive a grade of W, provided his/her attendance has been regular.

You are welcome to chat with the instructor after class or at other arranged times. There are, however, **NO** circumstances that render the moments **before** class appropriate for any discussion of any kind. If you should need to communicate with the instructor, and cannot get together at an appropriate time, please send an e-mail message.



## **CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR**

It is your responsibility to show respect for others by **refraining** from **any activity that might distract others or interfere with the learning process**. Failure to do so will affect your course grade!

1. The classroom is **not** a lunchroom: **NO EATING OR DRINKING in Class is Allowed**, unless you present signed certification by a doctor proving that you are medically required to do so.

2. The classroom is **not** a phonebooth. It is your responsibility to make sure that any **phone** you bring into the classroom is **turned off before** class begins. If your phone rings during class, you will lose credit for attendance that day.



## **TEXTS**

**A. COURSE**  **READER** [Available from Bel-Jean’s Printer, *downtown, opposite the UGA arch*]  
Includes readings from *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and from Peggy Beck et al., *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life*.

**B. REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS** [Available at local bookstores]

1. Merwyn **Garbarino** and Robert **Sasso**, *Native American Heritage*
2. William **Young**, *Quest for Harmony: Native American Spiritual Traditions*
3. Malcolm **Margolin**, *The Ohlone Way: Indian Life in the San Francisco...Bay Area*
4. Richard K. **Nelson**, *Make Prayers to the Raven: A Koyokun View of the Northern Forest*
5. John G. **Neihardt**, *Black Elk Speaks*

Most of the required readings will be found in the  **READER** or the required textbooks . Other assigned readings may be made available on reserve, either in hard-copy or as “e-texts” (accessible from any computer); on a designated webpage ; as handouts.



## REQUIREMENTS



**Timely** completion of all required readings



Three objective tests [each 20% of course grade]



A take-home final essay exam [40% of course grade]

See the “Criteria for Evaluation of Papers” in your course reader. If your written work seems to indicate that you failed to do all the assigned readings, or if your attendance is irregular, such facts will seriously affect your grade on specific assignments, and in the course overall, as noted above.

The ⚙️ **READER** also includes:

⚙️ **READER** Kirkland, “THE WRITING PROCESS AS PARTNERSHIP”; and

⚙️ **READER** Kirkland, “A GUIDE TO WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS.”

Following the advice provided there will help you write good papers, both in this and in other courses.

See also: (1) the UGA Writing Center, “Writing Resources”:

<http://www.english.uga.edu/writingcenter/writing/index.html>; and (2) “Writing the Religion Paper”:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/humanities/religion.shtml>.



## THE ACADEMIC VALUE OF THE INTERNET

Your instructor’s webpage ([HTTP://KIRKLAND.MYWEB.UGA.EDU](http://KIRKLAND.MYWEB.UGA.EDU)) includes a few pertinent STUDY GUIDES and LINKS. But, like many other good sites, this one has its limitations: (a) it is now **extremely out-dated**; (b) it has never provided all the material that even your instructor would like it to provide; and (c) it was not, in the first instance, designed to serve as a pedagogical tool.

Even such a website tries to fulfill different functions for different people: some are intended as professional connections for other scholars, others are designed to appeal to the general public. The latter may be more colorful or amusing, but are not necessarily more reliable or more informative.

Remember to *think critically about what you are seeing*: many sites have an unexpressed agenda, just like movies and TV shows, and some may be well-intentioned but insubstantial and/or unsound.

**So beware attempting to use the internet as an educational tool** — *particularly* in regard to Native American religions — **without expert guidance**. Remember that all a person has to do to create, for example, a website on “vision quests” is to set up the website: he or she does not really have to *know* anything sound or authentic about Native American religions! For psychological and/or economic reasons, some people set up such sites simply to get attention, or to get a reputation that they have not bothered to earn through hard work or proven expertise. Newcomers can easily mistake such a site for a reliable resource.

Before trusting what you find on ANY website, see the instructive guide to “Evaluating Websites” from a committee of the American Library Association at

<http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/EvaluatingWebsites1.htm>.

For evaluating websites about Native Americans, see most especially

<http://www.u.arizona.edu/%7Eecubbins/webcrit.html>.

There are now many good **tribal websites**, as well as many other reliable websites for Native American Studies, most of which can be found among the links at sites such as the following:

**American Indian Tribal Directory** <http://www.indians.org/Resource/FedTribes99/fedtribes99.html>

**Index of Native American Resources on the Internet** <http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources>

**NativeWeb** <http://www.nativeweb.org>

**Native Americans - Internet Resources** <http://falcon.jmu.edu/%7Eeramseyil/native.htm>

**Native American Indian Resources** <http://www.kstrom.net/isk/mainmenu.html>

Your instructor may recommend other websites that may be useful and reliable. But unless instructed otherwise, plan to do all of your research in your university **Library**.

## **COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS**

READINGS LISTED IN SQUARE BRACKETS ARE **RECOMMENDED**



### **INTRODUCTION: STUDYING “RELIGION”**



“WHY STUDY RELIGION?”: <http://www.studyreligion.org/why/index.html>

⚙ **READER:** "ON THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION IN AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES"

⚙ **READER:** "A DEFINITION OF RELIGION"



### **LOOKING AND SEEING: UNDERSTANDING RELIGION ACROSS CULTURES**

⚙ **READER:** Beck: 3-8

⚙ **READER:** Toelken, "Seeing with a Native Eye: How Many Sheep Will It Hold?"



### **HOW NOT TO STUDY NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIONS**



David Payne, “Why”: <HTTP://ONCAMPUS.RICHMOND.EDU/FACULTY/ASAIL/SYLL/DP.HTML>

⚙ **READER:** Sullivan, *Native American Religions*, Introduction (xii-xvi)

📖 **YOUNG**, *QUEST FOR HARMONY*: 9-10 [10-13]

⚙ **READER:** Kirkland, "Native American Religions" (from *Encycl. of Women and World Religions*)

⚙ **READER:** Peggy Beck: 8-32, 67-72b (top), 89a-93

📖 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 4-5, 374-85



### **APPROACHES TO RELIGION IN NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES**

⚙ **READER:** Sullivan, *Native American Religions*, Introduction (xii-xvi)

📖 **YOUNG**, *Quest for Harmony*: 9-10 [10-13]

⚙ **READER:** Kirkland, "Native American Religions"

⚙ **READER:** Beck: 8-32, Beck: 67-72b (top), 89a-93



### **THE CLASH OF CULTURES: ENCOUNTER AND CONQUEST**

📖 **YOUNG**, *Quest for Harmony*: 16-25 [25-29 ¶5] 29¶6-31 [31-48]

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 423-452 ¶2

 **VIDEOS:** "500 Nations":  
1. "Ancestors" (clip)  
2. "Clash of Cultures: The People Who Met Columbus"  
"The Native Americans: The Tribes of the Southeast"



### **OVERCOMING SPIRITUAL COLONIALISM: THE "RELIGION" OF "THE WANNABE TRIBE"**

 **YOUNG,** *Quest for Harmony.* 352 ¶3-353 top, 382-84, 218-220

 **READER:** Wendy Rose, "The Great Pretenders: Cults of the Culture Vultures"

 **READER:** Amanda Porterfield, "American Indian Spirituality as a Countercultural Movement"

 **VIDEO:** "White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men"

**[RESERVE:** Clifton, ed., *The Invented Indian:*

1. 193-207: Alice Kehoe, "Primal Gaia: Primitivists and Plastic Medicine Men"; and
2. 313-330: Christian Feest, "Europe's Indians"]



### **LIFE AMONG A "NON-PEOPLE": THE OHLONE OF CALIFORNIA**

 **MARGOLIN,** *The Ohlone Way.* all



### **LIFE IN A NORTHERN FOREST: THE "KOYUKON" OF ALASKA**

 **NELSON,** *Make Prayers to the Raven:* xiii-xvi [249-43; 1-13] 238-242, 14-46, 225-37, 248

 **VIDEOS:** "Make Prayers to the Raven"



### **ENACTING LIFE: PATTERNS AMONG PEOPLES OF THE GREAT LAKES AND THE GREAT PLAINS**

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 134-37, 261 ¶3-266 ¶5 [266 ¶6-272 ¶1] 272 ¶2-278 ¶3

 **READER:** Powers, "The Plains"  
Harrod, "The Blackfeet"

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 278-283

 **READER:** Powers, "Lakota"

 **YOUNG,** *Quest for Harmony.* 156-58 [164-84] 184-193 ¶4, 195-96, 197-200 [200-5]

 **READER:** Powers, "Drama"

Brown, "Sundance"

 **YOUNG**, *Quest for Harmony*. 209-13

 **READER:** Gill, "The Vision Quest" (among the Ojibwa / Chippewa / Anishinabe)

### History, Perceptions, and the Manipulation of Images:

 **NEIHARDT**, *Black Elk Speaks*: as assigned



## ENACTING LIFE: PATTERNS AMONG PEOPLES OF THE SOUTHWEST

### RELIGION AND LIFE AMONG THE PUEBLO PEOPLES

 **READER:** Whiteley, "The Southwest"

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 225 bottom – 228 ¶1, 233-242 ¶2

 **VIDEO:** "Hopi: Songs of the Fourth World"

### RELIGION AND LIFE AMONG AMONG THE NAVAJO

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 245-255

 **READER:** Lamphere, "The Navajo"

 **YOUNG**, *Quest for Harmony*. 228-29, 246-265

### BECOMING THE GODDESS

 **READER:** Lincoln, "Kinaaldá: Becoming the Goddess"

 **READER:** Gill, "Initiation at Puberty" (an Apache analogue)



## OLD ROADS / NEW ROADS: CHRISTIANITY, PEYOTE, AND RESTORING TRADITIONS

 **READER:** Powers, "Native American Church"  
Hultkrantz, "Ghost Dance"  
Jorgensen, "Modern Religious Movements"

 **GARBARINO/SASSO:** 482 ¶4-5

 **YOUNG**, *Quest for Harmony*. 273-74 [274-86] 286-88 [292-99] 378-82, 214-17

 **READER:** Beck: 165-66, 225-43

 **VIDEOS:** "Our Sacred Land"  
"Return of the Sacred Pole"