

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIONS

RELI 242

Bucknell University, Department of Religion
Spring 1999

Room: Vaughan Lit. 101
Instructor: John Grim
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Course Time: Tuesday/Thursday 8:00–9:30 a.m.
Office Hours: Tues., Wed., Thurs. 10a.m. - 1p.m.
Coleman 72

Indigenous peoples inhabited this continent for thousands of years prior to the European migrations and invasions to this "New World" from the 16th century. Native thought has contributed significantly to the emergence of American life, and native peoples have been intimately involved in the formative history of the American hemisphere. These contributions of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, however, are rarely acknowledged in the national histories of contemporary states in the region. While not a course in the history of American Indian peoples, our approach from the perspective of the History of Religions is concerned with the settings in which religious beliefs and practices emerge, change, and continue. In this course we focus largely on North American Indian religious life with some attention to MesoAmerican indigenous religions.

Courses in Native American Religions are often popular in college settings. Why? What is it that indigenous peoples of the Americas teach the dominant populations of the nation-states under whose control those indigenous peoples live? What is it that we learn about ourselves when we study other religious traditions? Do native peoples themselves want to teach us about their "religions," or do they approve of others teaching about their "traditions?"

American Indian religious leaders and scholars are concerned that the academic study of indigenous religious life will trivialize or exploit the religious beliefs of native peoples. Can we study the worldviews, rituals and environmental wisdom of Native American peoples with respect if at the same time we as a country restrict American Indian "voice" in governing their own lives? With these questions as overarching concerns, consider the following objectives of this course:

Course Objectives:

- to introduce students to the plurality of indigenous peoples in North America, and the diversity of cultural lifeways in which their religious beliefs and practices are located.
- to investigate the concept of "lifeways" as an approach for understanding religious beliefs and practices in cultural settings where those beliefs and practices cannot be separated from economics, politics, and social life.
- to study the religious beliefs and practices of Native American societies in such diverse expressions as origin myths, or cosmologies, sacred sites, symbol systems, and rituals.

- to explore the traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) with which American Indians have shaped their lifeways and their bioregions.

Course Description:

This course will focus on the larger North American continent and into MesoAmerica. A cultural-historical method will be used in conjunction with a comparative-thematic approach. The cultural approach emphasizes the different native nations and worldviews studied, whereas the historical approach is concerned with changes and continuities in native religious ideas and practices over time. This course also highlights indigenous ways of knowing which focus more on interconnected, synthetic, giving, and personalizing perspectives.

A lecture-conversation format will be used along with discussion of readings in smaller groups. The readings listed below in the "Course Calendar" suggest topics and questions for our discussions.

Videos are scheduled as an integral part of this course. You will be expected to view and write reaction essays to these videos on Native American religions and contemporary life placed on reserve in the library, or requested from Prof. Grim.

Required Books

Ella Deloria, Waterlily, Bison/Nebraska Press

John Grim, The Shaman, Civ. of Amer. Ind./Oklahoma Press

James McNeley, Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, U of AZ Press

Richard Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven, U of Chicago Press

Tim McCleary, The Stars We Know, Waveland Press

John Loftin, Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, Indiana U Press

Michael Crummett, Sun Dance, (reproduced from Falcon Press)

The following articles have been placed on **reserve** in the library –

Joseph Feagin, "Native Americans," in Racial and Ethnic Relations

James Merrell, "Shickellamy, A Person of Consequence," in Northeastern Indian Lives

John Grim, "Cosmogony and the Winter Dance," in The Journal of Religious Ethics

N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," in Native American Traditions

Kieth Basso, "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache," in Text, play and story

Lee Irwin, "Culture, Dreams, and Theory," in Dream Seekers

Mark St. Pierre, "Healers, Dreamers, Pipe carriers," in Walking in a Sacred Manner

Amanda Porterfield, "Lakota Self-Sacrifice," and "Navajo Sandpainting," in The Power of

Course Grading

The **mid-term** on **February 23rd** will cover all course material to that point. There will be no final exam in this course.

Each student will be expected to report in class on one contemporary **news event** from newspapers, magazines, or journals that relate to contemporary Native American peoples. Please make a copy of the item reported for the **Library Reserve File RELI 242**. This "new event" report must be given in class before April 22nd.

Five (5) written responses to videos are due over the semester. These two to three (2-3) page discussions must be completed by these dates, i.e. two (2) before the **mid-term exam February 23rd**, and the remainder **before April 22nd**. No video responses will be accepted after April 22nd. These responses should draw out your observations about the religious character of Native American life especially insights that are new to you. I will be evaluating your capacity to interpret the videos, your ability to articulate new insights, and your genius in seeing connections to course discussions.

There is one essay report of seven to ten (7-10) pages discussing a major American Indian religious idea, ritual, or event. We will discuss the procedure for this essay which is due **April 27th**.

The exam will count for 25% of your final grade, the 5 video essays will count for 30%, the essay report will count for 25%, the news event will count for 5%, and participation and attendance will count for 15%.

Course Calendar

Jan 14 - Introductory remarks, syllabus, "Dimensions in the Study of Religion"

Jan 19 - read: Feagin, "Native Americans"

[What insights did you gain from reading Feagin's article? How do you understand the relations of the "history" of indigenous Americans to their present situation? Cite one historical, or sociological, or political issue that helps you understand Native American peoples.]

Jan 21 - read: Merrell, "Shickellamy, A Person of Consequence," and Momaday, "The Man Made of Words."

[The story of the Oneida "governor," Shickellamy throws a different light on the strategic role of American Indian leader during the early colonial period. This article takes an historical approach and only hints at religious issues, but pay attention to Shickellamy's rhetoric and his concern for ritual propriety during treaties. The 2nd article by Momaday develops this idea of the significance and depth of oral narrative traditions in providing personal and social identity, ethical depth to one's life, and connections to ancestors and land. try to connect one of Momaday's insights to the article on Shickellamy.]

Jan 26 - read: Grim, "Cosmology and the Winter Dance"

[At this point in the course we are trying to focus on religious ideas and values which are both

unique to particular Native American peoples as well as shared among different indigenous and dominant societies. Think about the Winter Dance, why is it practiced at this time of year? What relationship does it establish between these Salish peoples and their bioregion? Can you appreciate the "remembering and forgetting" of sacred songs? What cultural purpose can it serve?]

Jan 28 - read: Deloria, Waterlily, pp. 229-244. [Describe the author of this novel.]

Guest Speaker, Ona Fleming, Prairie Pottawatomi

Feb 2 Religious Studies Forum / "Animal Rights; Human Obligations" Noon to 1p.m. - Walls Lounge (extra credit reaction papers accepted)

Feb 2 - read: Waterlily, pp. ix - 113.

[What strikes you as interesting in Deloria's description of Lakota life? What is one major religious ceremonial among the Lakota Oglala/Sioux described in this novel? Can you draw out the connections of this ritual to Lakota social life? Are there gender differences in religious practices among the Lakota according to this novel?]

Feb 4 - read: Waterlily, pp. 113 - 179

Feb 9 - read: finish Waterlily, pp. 179 - 227

[What role do kinship relations and kinship terminology have in Lakota society? Distinguish the roles of women and men in warrior societies, medicine groups, and community rituals. What Lakota worldview values are evident in this novel?]

Feb 11 - read: Crummett, Sun Dance, pp. vii - 24;
and McCleary, The Stars We Know, pp. xi - 13

Slides on Crow /Apsaalooke Sun Dance

[In what way is the Crow/Apsaalooke "Sun Dance" different from the Lakota Sun Dance described in Deloria's Waterlily? How do preparations enhance the religious meaning of the Sun Dance for Heywood Big Day and the Crow people? What events would you list as part of the "ritual process" of this ceremonial?]

Feb 16 - read: finish Sun Dance, pp. 24 - 73, and
McCleary, The Stars We Know, pp. 15 - 62

Guest Speaker, Coach Sid Jamieson (Lacrosse), Haudenosaunee/Iroquois

[What relationship do the Crow have to *ihké aléwahkuua*, "the stars we know?" What types of relationships are established with the star peoples by means of oral narratives?]

Feb 18 - read: finish The Stars We Know, pp. 63 - 112

Lee Irwin, "Culture, Dreams, and Theory," and
Amanda Porterfield, "Lakota Self-Sacrifice," and
Mark St. Pierre, "Healers, Dreamers, Pipe carriers," all on **reserve**

[What do you make of Irwin's effort to bring contemporary scientific theories to interpret Plains religious life? What does Irwin mean by the term "visionary episteme?" What observations does

Porterfield make about humility and self-sacrifice among the Lakota? In his article St. Pierre observes that healers have special relationships with sacred power. What are those relationships?]

Feb 23 - **** Mid -Term Exam ****

Feb 25 - read: Carrasco, Religions of Mesoamerica, pp. xv - 23.

[What impact did the Spanish have in MesoAmerica? What is the "ensemble approach" to gathering evidence for research? Explain "worldmaking," "worldcentering," and "worldrenewing."]

**Mar 2 Religious Studies Forum / What is Animal Welfare?
Noon to 1p.m. Walls Lounge (extra credit reactions accepted)**

Mar 2 - read: Religions of Mesoamerica, pp. 24 - 123

[What is the relation of history and cosmivision in Carrasco's interpretation? What is the relation of Olmec culture to Toltec and Aztec cultures? Develop a position on sacred architecture, sacred time, and the body as sacred in a way that interrelates these ideas in MesoAmerican cosmivision.

Why does the deity Quetzalcoatl have such a major role in Aztec religion? What are the relationships of the body to the power, tonalli and teyolia? What role do sacred mountains have in Aztec and Mayan religions? What recurring symbols figure prominently in Mayan religions? Why?]

Mar 4 - read: Religions of Mesoamerica, pp. 124-157

[What spiritual responses emerged among Native American peoples in the crises of colonial dominance (hegemony)? What religious continuity from prior traditional indigenous religious practice carries into the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe? What religious experiences are transmitted in the peyote way? What are the ritual branchings that stem from the MesoAmerican regard for the dead?]

Mar 9 - read: Loftin, , Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, pp. vii - 32

[What does Loftin mean by "religious practicality?" What are Hopi social forms that have spiritual meaning and why?]

Mar 11 - read: Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, pp. 33-61

[What roles do prayer and ritual have in binding the Hopi people together and to their bioregion? Distinguish Hopi worldview values.]

Mar 16 - read: finish Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, pp. 61 - 123

[Hopi thought about "prophecy" is dense and the ideas are rich. Develop your own interpretive position on Hopi "prophecy." How have contemporary issues such as resource mining and self-development entered into Hopi religious life? In what way is Hopi prophecy an ethical teaching for these First Peoples?]

Mar 18 - read: Basso, "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache."

[What role do stories have in relating landscape and ethics for the Western Apache? Basso and

Loftin both study Native American traditions in the Southwest, can you distinguish differences in their approaches?...in these American Indian traditions?]

Mar 23 - read: Grim, The Shaman, xi - 73

[Think about the person of the shaman and "power" and "ritual process." Distinguish how these relationships can be seen as interior mystical connections, or a political assertion of authority, or a statement of social status. Distinguish the four patterns used in this book, namely, cosmology, social sanction/approval, ritual, and altered states. What are the forms, or types, of Ojibway/Anishinaabe shamans? Relate the four patterns to those types of shaman.]

Mar 25 - read: The Shaman, pp. 73 - 119

[What does the term "cosmology" mean? Can you see any relation between the history of the Ojibway nation, their ideas about their woodland world, and their unique religious ceremony and society, Midewiwin?]

Mar 30 - read: finish The Shaman, pp. 120 - 208

[Consider the ways in which religious healing is undertaken among the Ojibway that relate to the four patterns. What makes the shaman religious? What are the formative experiences of "call," "withdrawal-sickness," and "emergence?" Why compare the shaman with other religious types?]

Apr 1 - read: McNeley, Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, pp. ix - xviii

[What kinds of concerns does McNeley have about "informants," "language," and "social linguistics? What does *ní Ich'í hwii'sizinií* mean? What does McNeley mean by "concordance method" for bringing together different statements about a religious idea from different individuals he interviewed?]

April 6 Religious Studies Forum / Western Philosophy, Christianity, and Descartes' Views on Animals - Noon to 1p.m. Walls Lounge

Apr 6 - read: Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, pp. 1-31

[What is a "Wind Soul" according to McNeley's construction of Navajo thought? What is the role of the origin myth, and chantways in Navajo thought? What roles does Wind have in the origin time?...in the present time?]

Apr 8 - read: Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, pp. 32 - 61

[What is the relationship of Wind to the individual Navajo person? Describe the ethical relationship of Wind with individual Navajo? Clarify for yourself Navajo psychological and cosmological thinking about Wind?]

Apr 13 - read: Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven, pp. xiii - 46

[Where are the Koyukon people located? What is Nelson's personal position on this study in relation to earlier such studies? What is the Koyukon view of the human in the natural world? What is the spiritual power for the Koyukon and where is it located?]

Apr 15 & 20 - read: Make Prayers to the Raven, pp. 47 - 199

[Explain the ethics embedded in *hutlaanee*? In what way is *hutlaanee* a conservation ethics? Select one realm of the animal or plant realm and be prepared to talk about Koyukon relations with that realm.]

Apr 22 - read: Make Prayers to the Raven, pp. 200 - 253

[What are some Koyukon subsistence patterns that have implications for the conservation of their local ecology? How do these ideas and practices relate to the Koyukon worldview?]

April 27 - **Essay due** Summary Remarks

Videos

In addition to these videos, check out the CD's entitled: "The American Indian," "Microsoft's 500 Nations," "Indian Question," "The Native Americans," "Wiyuta: Assiniboine Storytelling with Signs."

Suggested Sequence for Videos

Week of Jan 14 - View Shell Oil Film, "**The First Americans**," or "**The Ancestors early cultures of North America**" (E77 .F58x 1995 v.1) or "**Myths and moundbuilders**" BU#3524V [Distinguish pre-contact civilizations in America: Adena, Hopewell, Anasazi, Hohokam, Mogollon, Mississippian. Where are they located? What did they accomplish? How would you critique this film?]

Week of Jan 19 - Either "**In the Spirit of Crazy Horse**" or "**Live and Remember**," or "**Fulfilling the Vision**," or "**Thunderheart**" [Distinguish the connections made in these videos between rituals, spiritual power and Lakota identity. What event happened at Wounded Knee that is so important to contemporary Lakota identity?]

Week of Jan 26 - "**Dakota Conflict**" [What happened during the 1860s in the area now called Minnesota that is described in this video?] Or "**Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee** (1994) PN1997 LAKOTA. [An account of the 1070s American Indian Movement occupation of the Wounded Knee Post Office.]

Week of Feb 2 - "**Spirit in the Hole**" [Why would Native American rituals have been disallowed in prisons? What has been the effect of allowing native rituals in the "hole?"]

Week of Feb 9 - "**Crow/Shoshone Sun Dance**" BU3656V [Relate this video to Crummett's description of the Crow Sun Dance, or to McCleary's discussion of Crow star knowledge.]

Week of Feb 16 - "**The Honour of all**" BU#3591V [A powerful film documenting the fight against alcohol among a Shuswap village group in British Columbia.] Or "**The Peyote Road**" BU3853V [Discussion of the recent legislative assault against the Native American Peyote Church.]

Week of Feb 23 - "**Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya**," [Relate this incredibly beautiful cartoon telling of the Mayan creation myth video to Carrasco's discussion of death, sacrifice, blood-letting, and heroic personalities in Mesoamerican religions.] "**Voices from the present**" [Discussion of the "Mayan Movement" among contemporary Guatemalan Mayan peoples to find political voice after the harsh realities of persecution.]

Week of Mar 2 - "**The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico**," F1219.3.R38 F5 1996, or "**Mexico the rise and fall of the Aztecs**" E77 .F58x 1995 v.2 [Discussion of the Spanish-Aztec struggle in the 1520s especially focused on the capital Tenochtitlan.]

Week of Mar 9 - "Hopi, songs of the fourth world" BU#1948V [An important video describing the lifeway of Hopi peoples.]

Week of Mar 16 - "Indian pottery of San Ildefonso" BU#1744V [Discussion of the process of pottery in a Southwestern pueblo.] Or **"The Sunrise dance" E99.A6 S863 1994** [Magnificent film describing the Western Apache girl's puberty ceremony.]

Week of Mar 23 - "Wisconsin Powwows" E99.C6 W5 1996 v.1 and "Namakaaged: Dancer for the People" E99.C6 W5 1996 -- v.2 [Excellent video discussions of the contemporary powwow dancing circuit focused on Wisconsin Reservations.]

Week of Mar 30 - "Enduring Ways of the Lac du Flambeau Ojibway" [Beautiful discussion of the seasons and lifeway of contemporary Lac du Flambeau Ojibway peoples.]

Week of Apr 6 - " Broken rainbow" BU#1988V [Award winning video focused on the removal of 12,000 Navajo from the Joint Use Area in dispute with Hopi peoples.]

Week of Apr 13 - "River people: behind the case of David Sohapp" BU#4404V [Powerful video discussion of the relentless investigation, persecution, and conviction of a Yakima elder who stood up to the Washington state Fish and Game Dept.]

Week of Apr 20 - "Circle of the Spirit: a saga of Native peoples and the catholic Church," BU 4479V, or "To protect Mother Earth: broken treaty II" BU#4092V [The latter is a powerful discussion of the fight of the Western Shoshone, focused on two sisters, to save their lands from being sold by their guardian, the Sec. of the Interior, to the U.S. Government.]