

SYLLABUS
R.133.A Native American Religions
Spring, 2010

Dr. St. John
Comenius Hall 204.
Phone: (O) 861-1585
(H) 691-1797

Ofc. Hrs:
WF 12:30-1:00 p.m.; M. 6-6:30pm
T-Th 1:30-2:00 p.m.
e-mail. medps01@moravian.edu

Course Description. A study of traditional myths, rituals, religious experiences and lifeways of select indigenous peoples of North America. Studies of the religious life and experience of representative groups from the Eastern Woodlands, Northern Boreal Forests, Southwest, and Plains cultural-geographical regions will be highlighted this semester.

Course Format. Lecture/Discussion.

Objectives. To provide the student with a basic understanding of the worldviews, including beliefs and practices, of several indigenous religious traditions, to become familiar with approaches to the study of such traditions, and to develop the imaginative and analytical skills needed to enter into the world of "the other," and to foster reflection on the cultural forces that have shaped one's own attitudes, values, and sense of self.

Course Expectations. Students will be expected to come to each class prepared to enter into the discussion or otherwise to participate in the class. Roll will be called. Lastly, students will be expected to be able to recognize and write about the significant aspects of each tradition dealt with, connecting themes into a comprehensive essay.

Electronic Devices. Please do not twitter, twirl, tweet, text or twist while in class. Turn off cell phones, etc.

Snow or Illness Policy. Even when blizzard conditions prevail, if the college has not declared itself officially closed (weather hotline: (610) 625-7995), students should assume that classes will be held (off-campus residents should exercise prudence, however). When ill or snowed in and unable to make class, the professor will contact the Registrar who will notify the HUB and place a notice online as well as on the classroom door prior to class time. In such a case a student is not responsible for showing up or remaining in the classroom for the twenty minute courtesy period. If class is cancelled, please read the assignment for the next class.

Course Evaluation. 1) Writing-to-Learn Assignments. Either written prior to class at home or in class, these one-page exercises are intended to improve classroom participation, indicate to the teacher if a student is having problems with the work and help the student to keep up with the reading assignments. They will be marked with a "S" or a "U". If you are absent you receive a "U" if a writing assignment is given in class. There will be no make-up writing assignments with rare exceptions. At the end of the semester, if you receive an "S" on 80% or more of your papers, your final grade for the course will be raised one notch (ex. B- to B). Between 60 and 79%, your final grade does not change. If fewer than 60% are "S," your final average grade for the three essay exams drops one notch (ex. B- to C+).

2) Essay Exams. There will be three essay exams, weighed equally. Non-cumulative except for the final where the instructor reserves the right to ask one question on overall course content, theme or method.

Required Texts

Grim, John. *The Shaman*
Neihardt, John. *Black Elk Speaks*
Nelson, Richard K. *Make Prayers to the Raven*

Sandner, Donald, M.D. *Navaho Symbols of Healing*

Tooker, Elisabeth *Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands*

OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS

I. EASTERN WOODLANDS

THE OJIBWAY AND THE STUDY OF SHAMANISM

The shaman and shamanic practices are at the core of most religious experiences of indigenous peoples. Shamans, through their communion with spirit beings and forces of the cosmos are able to bring wisdom and power to their people. Through their dream-vision and other trance states, they enter into contact with spirit beings and powers and are able to transmit such wisdom and power to advise and heal their people in time of need. Since the shaman is historically the earliest religious specialist, understanding his or her role and the symbol system surrounding and legitimating their power offers many insights into the nature of religious experience in general, the further elaboration and development of religious ways of knowing by the mystic, prophet and priest, and its connection to the wider universe whose sacred dimension continues to nurture the human spirit.

Jan. 20 Introduction to the Study of Indigenous Tradition

Jan. 22 Siberian Shamanism
Read: Grim, Ch. 2

Jan 27 Ojibway Cosmology and Becoming a Shaman
Read: Grim, Chs. 4 & 8
Video. Millenium Pt. 4

Jan 29 Communal Sanction
Read: Grim, Ch. 5

Feb. 03 Ritual Reenactment
Read: Grim, Ch. 6

Feb. 05 Trance Experience
Read: Grim, Ch. 7
Video. Millenium Pt. 8

II. EASTERN WOODLANDS: IROQUOIS (HO-DE-NO SAU NEE)

The Iroquoian peoples in their great mythic tale of the origins of natural life and of human society imagine this world as infused with sacred power (orenda) given by beings from the world "above." They combine myths of a fall from heaven, of the earth diver, and of the warring twins to capture the dynamics and mystery of their world. In their dreams they experience guidance and power from the spirit beings of the three levels of the cosmos. reality. Even the Evil Twin can aid humans if they know how to reverse his power and turn it to their benefit. The dream-vision experiences of the Iroquoian peoples exemplify and "democratizes" this basic shamanic source of revelation and power, making it available to all people and functional in the most concrete aspects of human life.

Feb. 10 Cosmology, Shamans and the Dream
Tooker, pp. 31-58
St. John, "The Dream Vision Experience"
Video: Woodland Indians, Pt.1

Feb. 12 Shamanic "Medicine Societies"
St. John "Iroquois Medicine Societies"
Tooker, Ch. IV
Video: " The Woodland Indians" Pt. 2

Feb. 17 Handsome Lake, Seneca Prophet
Read: St. John "Handsome Lake"

Feb. 19 Iroquois Agriculture and Thanksgiving Cycle
Read: Tooker, Ch. VIII
St. John "The Longhouse Religion"
Take-Home Exam #1 (Due Back by 6:00p.m. Monday Feb 22nd)

III. SOUTHWEST: NAVAHO (DINEH)

CHANTWAYS & SYMBOLIC HEALING

The Navaho of the Southwest use their emergence myth of origins to undergird their elaborate curing rituals which bring the power of the origins to rebalance relationships between inner and outer, depth and surface and to bring harmony among humanity, nature and the holy people. The ideal for the Navaho is hozho (balance, harmony), both a balance around a center and the fruitful change that lives between opposites. Changing Woman, the major mythical being in the Navaho origin myth, wove and weaves the earth with the home with the work of the hands.

FEB. 23 Tu FILM: "Woven Ways" on the Navaho and their land 7:30p.m. UBC Rm, HUB

Feb. 24 Introduction to the Southwest Peoples
Video: "The Southwest"
Navaho Symbols of Healing.
Read: Sandner, Ch. 1 and Ch. 10

Feb. 26 Navaho Religion. The Parts.
Read: Sandner, Ch. 3.

Mar. 03 Navaho Religion: The Whole.
Read: Sandner, Ch. 4
Video. "Touching the Timeless" (Segment. M.6)

Mar. 05 Healing and the Return to Origins.

Read: Sandner, Ch. 6
Video: "At the Threshold" M.10

March 10 & 12 Spring Break

Mar. 17 Healing and the Death-Rebirth Experience.
Read: Sandner, Ch. 8
The Apache Sunrise Dance
Read: Handout
Video: The Sunrise Dance

**March 18 Film, "Crude" Ecuadorian Indigenous People and Big Oil's Impact on the Rainforest
Prosser, 7:30 p.m.**

IV. THE FAR NORTH

KOYUKONS AND SACRED ECOLOGY

The Koyukon of present day Alaska have traditionally lived a life dependent on trapping, hunting, and fishing. They had a highly sophisticated and broad knowledge of the mammals, fish, and fowl of the boreal forests and streams, and they were familiar with the cyclical nature of their presence or absence: seasons, years, decades. Their relations with all beings and the land itself was based on stories of the Distant Time and regulated through a complex set of ethical rules linked to a belief in the spiritual dimension to all things.

Mar. 19 The Koyukons of Alaska
Nelson, Ch. 1, 2,
Videos: "Make Prayers to the Raven", #1

Mar. 24 Earth, Water and Sky
Nelson, Chs. 3 & 6
Videos: "Make Prayers to the Raven", # 3

Mar. 26 Hunting and Trapping
Nelson, Chs. 9, 10, 11
Videos: MPTR Nos. 4, 5

Mar. 31 Koyukon Sacred Ecology
Read: Nelson, Ch. 12, 13
Video: MPTR, #2
Take-Home Exam #2 (Due Mon. 6:00p.m.)

Apr. 02 Easter Break No Class

V THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESISTANCE: THE RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

Black Elk of the Lakota Sioux serves as a bridge between the shaman and the prophet. His great vision as retold to John Neihardt displays the shamanic visitation by spiritual beings fundamental to the Lakota cosmology and his ritualization of this vision so that his people might participate in the power and guidance contained in his vision. Occurring during a time of historical crisis experienced by the plains Indians, Black Elk's vision reminds his people of the power contained in their traditions while warning of a black road that lies ahead.

Apr. 07 Plains Culture , Kinship and History
Video: "Plains Indians, Pt. II"

Apr. 09 Black Elk's Vision
Neihardt, Chs 1-3

Apr. 14 Crazy Horse, Custer and Little Big Horn
Neihardt, Chs. 8-9

Apr. 16 Ritual Reenactments
Neihardt, Chs. 13-16

Apr. 21 Lakota Vision Quest
Neihardt, Chs. 17 & 18

Apr. 23 Life-Cycle
Girl's Buffalo Ceremony
Handouts
Video. Millenium 3.1&3.2

Apr. 28 Buffalo Bill and the Ghost Dance
Neihardt, Chs. 19-23

Apr. 30 Wounded Knee and Beyond
Neihardt, 24-end
Take-Home Exam #2

T.B.A. FINAL EXAM

Humans live in culture as fish live in water: it surrounds them, permeates them, shapes their evolution, and is largely below their conscious awareness. Through the internalization of their culture, a group adopts a way of being, knowing and acting that seems "natural" to them. Each individual mind is shaped by and subsequently shapes its culture and its history. The power and content for individual self-reflection and self-understanding are dependent on the symbolic resources made available by one's culture as is one's understanding of Nature and the wider Cosmos. In turn, our culture provides by which we can chronicle and express our experience of the human condition, our hopes and fears, loves and hates, aspirations and doubts through language, the arts, and the sciences.

Religion as a cultural entity provides symbols (images, objects, actions, persons) that orient us to and allow us to experience that which is deemed "sacred" and to differentiate it from what is considered "profane." The religious worlds vary from culture to culture and tradition to tradition. One aspect of religion that sets it apart from other cultural phenomena (in addition to its concern with the sacred) is its holistic character. A religious symbol system attempts to provide an overarching context within which to interpret the value and significance of all other aspects of life. Usually a myth or a story, whether explicit or implicit, provides a meaning to human life and death, embodied in the actions and words of sacred beings (supernatural, natural and cultural). The life-story of a people and of each individual in a traditional world finds its context and gets its meaning from this larger story.

In addition, the sub-traditions ("art" and "literature", music and architecture, etc.) embody and express both the continuities and changes in the traditional world. Thus, an outsider cannot assume that his or her ways of apprehending and understanding a particular object or action, for example, is correct or adequate. The "outsider" has been conditioned by her and his culture and its perspectives which are taken to be the norm. One must, as far as possible (and it is rarely fully possible) shed one's ingrained ways of "seeing," "knowing," and "judging," if one is to hope to enter into the world of another culture or tradition.

Yet, one needs guidance in moving from the known to the unknown, from a social world of the early 21st century to a shamanistic world as old as humans. And the journey may shed light on our "privileged" narratives whether secular or religious.