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## ENGL 4860

### Multicultural Topics: Native American Literature

Call # 50-697

Room 259 Park Hall

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2-3:15

#### Why

Most of the times that I've begun a new course, I've remembered how important it is to tell my students what I want them to learn, in the broadest and most over-arching sense I can. Usually, I can come up with the broad sense of a course pretty easily -- in early American lit, I want to show that early writers about America reserved the place as an imaginative rather than a real place; in American Romanticism, I try to demonstrate that the sense of "manifest destiny" of the place had evolved into what its purveyors saw as an inexorable march of culture. I can come up with those answers quickly because I already know why you and I read those writers -- we do so to understand ourselves as Americans. The "why" question grows much harder in Native American Literature 4860: I even find myself starting to put quotes around words I've never marked as questionable before. One of the first things you'll figure out is that Native Americans (we call them) don't call themselves Native Americans but instead (if they ever have to refer to themselves as one group at all) tend to like "Indian" or "Injun" because they like to emphasize the foolishness of Columbus's first use of *indios* to describe them. And if you're paying any mind at all to the last sentence, you should already be thinking, "Wait a minute. Who does he mean by *you* and *we* and *them*?" If you're really into calling people by what they consider to be their real names (sometimes called "political correctness" but generally what my mother considered to be good manners), you'll also note that to be accurate we should be calling these folks Cherokee or Navaho-- closer to true, but still off the mark. *Cherokee* is a loose rendition of a Delaware word for *foreigner* or *enemy*, used to describe a nation whose language is *tsalagi* but who call themselves *Yunwiya* (the "real people" -- this word could be transcribed several ways, depending upon what intonation we're using and on whether you're stuck as badly as I am in [Intermediate Cherokee: Lesson Two](#)). The word *Navaho* is also borrowed by English speakers to describe the *Dine* (some accent marks that I can't even begin to create on my computer should appear there also). So -- we're going to have to spend some time on all three words in "Native American Literature," and even when we get done, we'll probably feel even less "expert" than we did before. Even if we've scoped out the *Native* part and think we know what *American* means, the author in *Cogewea* will frequently talk about *Americans* and *Caucasians* in the same sentence, and we'll have to tinker with that distinction a bit too in *Ceremony*. At least we shouldn't feel left out of the confusion since I still can't figure out why Amerigo Vespucci supplies the most recent name for this continent; that's like naming the moon not for Neil Armstrong but for Tom Wolfe since Wolfe wrote the most popular description of the moon project.

Anyway, the "why" part of our quest may well end up looking at the *Literature* part of the course title, but it will frequently look back at the other two words. Why do we read Native/Indian/Injun Lit? You or I may have started with Tony Hillerman's Chee/Leaphorn mysteries and only slowly realized that the Dine chants upon which some of his plots turned were attractive rituals but were very "second-hand." Eventually we would realize that Hillerman isn't Navaho at all, and that many Dine deplore his use of those rituals, much as a devout Roman Catholic might be disturbed by someone's use of the Mass as a structure for a comedy routine. Or we may have started reading some Indian mysticism, with, say, Hythemost Storm, and we'd like to continue our "spiritual growth" by reading other such writers. Or we may have just a several-great grandmother was a "Cherokee princess" and we've set out to claim our heritage. Questions abound: is Hillerman's *Talking God* Native American literature? It's certainly about Indians, and if *Oroonoko* is "early American literature" because it is about the imaginative role of the continent America in the English-speaking reading audience of Aphra Behn, then so is *Talking God*. But that's probably not what you had in mind when you signed up for this course. We will certainly see tribal religious imagery used in the books to read this quarter, especially *Ceremony* and *House Made of Dawn*, but you'll be foolish to think that those authors want you to take their novels as handbooks on theology. In fact, Indian authors tend to be very reticent to give details of religious ceremonies, particularly ceremonies that are both stories and rituals, as most Dine chants are. And you cannot assume that Indian authors would even tell us the "truth" (oops -- another problematic word) about such ceremonies since they can tell the difference between fiction and reality, even if we can't (a complaint many Natives have about us, whatever "us" means this week). In fact, one of the few things I will expect you to notice in the fiction we'll be reading is an emphasis on "story" and "family" (those darn quotes again). I will hope yet will not have a right to expect this fiction will give you a new personal view of those two notions, but if you have just discovered that you are part Indian, I predict you will eventually find yourself defining "Indian" in a way that will determine that you are not Indian but are from a family that is newly interesting to you, not for the blood quantum, but for the stories to come.

So -- why do we read Indian lit? I hope that you will come to read it because of its sense of story and sense of family, that you will know why Scott Momaday's long-dead (great)-grandmother spoke to him in the midst of writing session, why the direst Indian insult of all is to be a person who acts as if he has no relatives, and why "I'm an Indian Outlaw" was number one at the Qualla reservation for months.

#### Spring 2002 Reading and Assignments Calendar

Texts in reading order (abbreviations follow):

Turner, *North American Indian Reader* (NAIR)

Quintasket, *Cogewea* (Cog)

Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (HMOD)

Welch, *Fools Crow* (FC)

Silko, *Ceremony* (Cer)

King, *Green Grass, Running Water* (GGRW)  
 Various, Group Assigned Text (GA)

RR = Reading Report

Week 1	1/8 Intro (start Cog intro, first 10 chapters)	1/10 NAIR (1-18, 86-105, 158-175)
Week 2	1/15 Cog (second 10 chapters). RR1 due	1/17 Cog (remainder of book)
Week 3	1/22 HMOD intro. RR2 due. NAIR (175-206)	1/24 HMOD (through 100 pp.)
Week 4	1/29 HMOD (film?)	1/31 HMOD (remainder)
Week 5	2/5 draft of paper 1 due	2/7 FC (section 1: 1-125)
Week 6	2/12 paper 1 due	2/14 FC (section 2: 129-202)
Week 7	2/19 FC (section 3: 207-284) RR3	2/21 FC (289-360); Cer intro
Week 8	2/26 Cer (about 100 pp.) RR4	2/28 Cer (about 100 pp.)
Week 9	3/5 Cer (remainder)	3/7 GGRW intro
Week 10	3/12 draft of paper 2 due. GGRW (1-107)	3/14 GGRW (107-250)
Break	3/18	To 3/22
Week 11	3/26 paper 2 due GGRW (250-361)	3/28 GGRW (361-469). (film?)
Week 12	4/2 RR5 due. GGRW if needed. NAIR tba	4/4 NAIR tba, handouts
Week 13	4/9 RR6 due (film?)	4/11 NAIR tba, handouts
Week 14	4/16 Group reports this week	4/18 Group reports this week
Week 15	4/23 Group papers due	4/25 wrapup
	Final Exam: Monday, May 6, 3:30-6:30	

Group assignments will come from this list of books: Winona LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman*; Louise Erdrich, *Antelope Wife*; Alfredo Vea, *La Maravilla*; Greg Sarris, *Grand Avenue*; Louis Owens, *Dark River*; Ella Deloria, *Waterlily*.

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