# NAS 2600 Native American Literature

T/TH 9:25-10:40 UH C630 Instructor: Dr. Kimberly Roppolo

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#### A. Course Description from the 2004-05 Calendar:

"Survey of the North American Native in literature as developed by Native and non-Native writers."

#### **B.** Course content:

Native American Literature will cover a range of works by American Indian/First Nations intellectuals, short story writers, novelists, playwrights, poets, and filmmakers. The course will also examine depictions of Native Americans in texts and films by non-Native writers. Historical and cultural context for the primary texts will be explored in lecture and class discussion.

## C. Course objectives:

- 1. Students should gain an introduction to important American Indian/First Nations literary works and intellectual theories as well explore depictions of Native Americans by non-Natives in literature and film;
- 2. Students will gain exposure to a variety of literary genres;
- 3. Students will self-reflect on their own relationships with American Indian/First Nations literatures, within American history, and within their culture and various subcultures (discourse groups);
- 4. Students should gain interpretive skills enabling them to understand American Indian/First Nations works;
- 5. Students will improve writing skills by developing both exploratory writings and a formal, researched project on the novel *Fools Crow*:
- 6. Students should develop an appreciation for American Indian/First Nations literatures;
- 7. Students will display knowledge of the content of the assigned readings through quizzes, exploratory writings, group work, and the major project.

### D. Books:

Purdy, John L., and James Ruppert, eds. Nothing but the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature.

Welch, James. Fools Crow.

Cheechoo, Shirley. A Path with No Moccasins.

## Films:

Apocalypto (out of class; must have viewed and done exploratory writing for by September 20)

Dance Me Outside (in class viewing)

On and Off the Rez with Charley Hill

The Fast Runner (out of class; must have viewed and done exploratory writing for by October 16; available in the library on reserve)

### Websites for Apocalypto:

http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\_article.html?article\_id=30b26a79892960 ff7423d128365eb3ab

http://www.archaeology.org/online/reviews/apocalypto.html

http://www.archaeology.org/online/reviews/apocalypto2.html

http://drconway.wordpress.com/2006/12/01/early-review-of-mel-gibsons-apocalypto/< o:p>

http://drconway.wordpress.com/2006/12/16/university-professors-and-academics-critic ize-apocalypto-

reflections-on-a-recent-listserve-thread/#comments

http://www.turtleisland.org/discussion/viewtopic.php?t=5094 (PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO CARTER REVARD'S COMMENTS AT THE END)

# E. General course outline:

There will be several exploratory writings of between two-and-a-half to three **typed** double-spaced pages in MLA format. I expect you to use quotations from and references to the primary text and to utilize MLA format. The only exception to this is that I do not expect you to use direct quotes from the films in the assignments, but I do expect you to take notes while watching the films so that you may discuss them intelligently in your writing. I do, however, expect you to directly quote or paraphrase comments from the websites or any other sources in writing about the film.

You will bring these exploratory writings to class the day they are due so that we may use them to aid discussion that day. You will turn them in at the end of class; however, in order to ensure that all students do their work before class, I will only grade the typed portion of your work, not handwritten insertions.

There will be unannounced quizzes over the readings, films, and lectures. There will be group work completed during class time only, as I realize you all have diverse schedules and meeting outside of class can be difficult. Students will complete a major project over James Welch's *Fools Crow* (further described on the assignment sheet).

## F. Policies and other important information

Office hours -- I will be in my office in the Native American Studies Department on the fourth floor of University Hall from 8:20-9:20 on most Tuesdays and Thursdays and from 12:15-1:15 on most Tuesdays in case you need to meet with me regarding class. I will also meet with you in my office by appointment.

Absents and tardies --

- -- Even though the 2007-08 Calendar does not list an attendance requirement for this course, since the success of literature courses is dependent upon your doing your readings and attending class and discussing the texts, to do my job well, I have to find some way to ensure that you do this. Therefore, I have created the strict
  - Late Work policy listed below.

    Out of courtesy and professionalism, please treat this course the way you would treat
  - -- Out of courtesy and professionalism, please treat this course the way you would treat a job. Let me know as soon as possible if you must miss class. You may contact me by phone or e-mail (listed above).

#### Late Work --

- Always keep two back up copies of your written work (at least one electronic: on your hard drive, a disk, a CD, etc.) I find that if you just save once, problems can occur that will cause assignments to be late. Make sure you have alternate methods of recovering your data if confusion should arise or whether or not you turned in an assignment, in case you lose your backpack on the way to class, in case your dog ate your homework, etc.
  - -- I only accept late work on **exploratory writing** with a documented excused absence. I will determine whether or not a particular absence is excused.
  - -- It is important to know that **quizzes and groupwork** may not be made up, whether or not you are absent, with or without an excuse.
  - -- I will not accept late *Fools Crow* projects. Failure to turn these in on time results in failure of the course unless the Dean has approved an incomplete (see below) through the proper application process.



For more information and possible assistance with these matters, contact Counselling at tel. 403-320-5700 or come to the Information Centre (SU 140).

Academic and non-Academic Offenses: from the 2007-08 Calendar -- There is an extensive section in the Calendar on pages 68-74 regarding cheating, plagiarism, student conduct, and disciplinary procedures, including expulsion. All U of L students should familiarize themselves with these regulations and penalties. Grade Percentages:

\*Please note that I give letter grades, not number grades, on individual assignments. The conversion chart for the 4.0 scale reporting system is below.

Exploratory Writings 25 %

Quizzes - - 25 %

Group Work -- 25 %

Fools Crow Project -- 25 %

Ø Grading Scale:

A +/A 4.0

A- 3.7

B+ 3.3

B 3.0

C+ 2.3

C 2.0

C- 1.7 D+ 1.3

#### **G.** Tentative Schedule:

\*Note: Do the readings listed for the class meeting <u>before</u> class. In other words, what is listed is what we are discussing that day.

**September 6** -- Ms. Bromley-Wadsworth will take roll, hand out the syllabus, and make the first assignment. Students should make a list of questions for Dr. Roppolo regarding the syllabus as they read over it at home. We will answer these the next time we meet. Also do the following:

## Homework: Exploratory Writing #1

This semester, we will attempt to discuss our texts from we in the NAS department call "Native Perspective." Write the first half of your exploratory writing explaining what the term "Native Perspective" means to you and what, if any, views of reality and the universe around us you think might be generally shared by people with Indigenous American ancestry.

Next, explore http://imagesofindiansinchildrensbooks.blogspot.com/, making sure to click on and read "Older Posts" at the end of the page as well. Taking into consideration the kinds of images Reese finds objectionable in children's books, discuss these as well as other images of Native people that permeate popular culture and how you think this matches or clashes with the concept of Native perspective you put forth in the first half of your writing. Conclude by explaining how you think created images of Native people in literature by Native and non-Native people might be impacted or not by popular culture and (mis)education.

September 11 -- Dr. Roppolo will lead discussion on Native Perspective; *Fools Crow* Project Assigned; Exploratory Writing #1 due at the end of class

Homework: Reminder: Each time, read the selections listed for the next class meeting ahead of time. Be prepared for a quiz and/or discussion.

**September 13** -- "Introduction" to Purdy and Ruppert; David L. Moore, "Nonfiction"; Paula Gunn Allen, "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective"; Simon Ortiz, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism"; assign terms for *Fools Crow* Project

September 18 -- Leslie Marmon Silko, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective"; Leslie Marmon Silko, "An Old-Time Indian Attack in Two Parts: Part One -- Imitation 'Indian' Poems/Part Two -- Gary Snyder's Turtle Island"; N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words";

Group Work #1

Discuss: How do you see your role in the study of American Indian/First Nations literatures and intellectual theories? How does who you are impact what you are reading and how you read it? Are there any responsibilities attached to this? Take notes during your discussion. Write a page or so as a group detailing your discussion. Make sure each person puts his or her name on the work. We will discuss these as a large group and turn them in before leaving class.

## Homework: Exploratory Writing #2

Watch the film *Apocalypto*. Note: If you do not want your children subjected to nudity and graphic violence, don't let them watch the movie with you. Take notes as you watch, so that you may later write down your responses to the film. What did you like? Why? What did you not like? Why? How good of a job do you think the film does of portraying the greater story of history from a Native perspective? Think about the different roles people play in the creation of a film, from writing to acting to directing to costuming to creating set pieces to producing? What impact do you think this multiple authorship plays in creating or not creating Native perspective in this film? Write the first half of your exploratory writing answering these questions.

Now, read the websites listed in the section above called Websites for *Apocalypto*. Pick three of the commentaries from this section (some sites contain more than one commentary) and use quotes and paraphrases and to engage these writers in a dialogue with your own ideas about the film in the rest of your exploratory writing. How did the writers' comments change or not change your own views about the film?

September 20 -- Dr. Roppolo will lead discussion on the film Apocalypto

Exploratory Writing #2 due at the end of class.

**September 25** -- Presentations and discussion of *Fools Crow* 

**September 27** -- Presentations and discussion of *Fools Crow* 

October 2 -- Presentations and discussion of Fools Crow

October 4 -- Presentations and discussion of *Fools Crow* 

October 9 -- Presentations and discussion of *Fools Crow* 

October 11 -- Presentations and discussion of *Fools Crow* 

## Homework: Exploratory Writing #3

Watch the film *The Fast Runner* (available in the library on reserve for this course). Again, if you do not want your children subjected to nudity and some violence, do not let them watch the movie with you. Take notes as you watch the movie. This one may require more than one viewing -- it certainly took me more than one time to catch everything, and I still learn more each time I watch it. One thing that will help is looking at. http://www.atanarjuat.com/ **BEFORE** watching the film to get the names and plot down. I suggest looking at the sections "The Legend Behind the Film" and "Geneology [sic]."

After watching the film, look at the other sections of the website, paying careful attention to all aspects of production -- who, what, when, where, why, and how in "Production Diary," "Credits," and "About Isuma." In your exploratory writing, examine how the change in control over artistic production and the difference in motive (profit vs. "preserve and enhance Inuit culture and language") affect the films *Apocalypto* and *The Fast Runner* in terms of the presentation of Native Perspective.

October 16 -- Dr. Roppolo will lead discussion on the film *The Fast Runner* 

Exploratory Writing #3 due at the end of class.

October 18 -- Louis Owens, "Fiction"; Anna Lee Walters, "The Warriors"; Zitkala Sa, "The Soft-Hearted Sioux"; and D'Arcy McNickle, "The Hawk is Hungry"

## Group Work #2:

How can fiction be used to comment on history? To revise the way it is told? Think both about these stories and about Fools Crow. Discuss the view of Native people in the past in both of the films as well. Do any of the works tend to support stereotypes such as the Vanishing Indian, the Noble Savage with a romanticized past, or the wild, barbaric savage? How do each of these works, in other words, depict Native people, as cardboard cutouts or as fully-dimensional human beings? What kinds of characteristics do these works suggest Native people have or had? Do these works support or contradict the historical practice of tribal peoples to preserve their own stories of themselves in the oral tradition? Take notes during your discussion. Write a page or so as a group detailing your discussion. Make sure each person puts his or her name on the work. We will discuss these as a large group and turn them in before leaving class.

October 23 -- Louis Owens, "Blessed Sunshine"; Luci Tapahonso, "All the Colors of Sunset"; and Louise Erdrich, "The Red Convertible"

October 25 -- Leslie Silko, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds"; "Yellow Woman"; and "Tony's Story"

#### Homework: Exploratory Writing #4

In this exploratory writing, I want you to explore the following questions. How do you envision the relationship between tradition and contemporary life? What can contemporary stories such as those we have read for October 23, October 25, and those we will discuss October 30 "give back" to American Indian/First Nations communities? Do these contemporary writers write the stories of a person or a people?

October 30 -- Simon Ortiz, "The Killing of a State Cop"; Thomas King, "Borders"; and "A Seat in the Garden"

Exploratory Writing #4 due at the end of class.

November 1 -- Dance Me Outside -- In-class viewing of film

November 6 -- Dance Me Outside -- In-class viewing of film

November 8 -- Dr. Roppolo will lead discussion on Dance Me Outside

## Group Work #3

Respond to this film. How do you feel about it? What does it remind you of? What are some of the complications of the film's origin in a novel written by a non-Native

writer whom many Native Americans feels depicts Natives stereotypically? Do the Native actors and consultants successfully "appropriate" the text? What does it say that more than one Native author has appropriated/satirized this novelist's work? Take notes during your discussion. Write a page or so as a group detailing your discussion. Make sure each person puts his or her name on the work. We will discuss these as a large group and turn them in before leaving class.

November 13 -- Mary TallMountain, "The Disposal of Mary Joe's Children"; Eric Gansworth's "Unfinished Business"; and Jim Northrup, "Veteran's Dance"

November 15 -- Greg Sarris' "How I Got to Be Queen"; Sherman Alexie, "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor"; and "This is What it Means to say Phoenix, Arizona"

November 20 -- Shirley Cheechoo, A Path with No Moccasins

November 22 -- Vine Deloria, "Indian Humor"; Carter Revard, "Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe"; On and Off the Rez with Charley Hill--In-class viewing of film

November 27 -- Kimberly Blaeser, "The Possibilities of a Native Poetics" (READ AHEAD OF TIME)

\*We will read the poems out loud in class -- I am of the firm opinion poetry is primarily an oral art.

All poems by Wendy Rose; Crystos; Mary Tall Mountain; Roberta Hill Whiteman; Carter Revard, "Driving in Oklahoma" and "In Kansas"; and Leslie Marmon Silko, "Indian Song: Survival," "Storytelling," "Story from Bear Country," "Toe'osh: A Laguna Coyote Story," and "When Sun Came to Riverwoman". Poems in handouts. November 29--

#### Begin Group Work #4

How does poetry tell story differently? Are there reasons why, in your opinion, that poetry is a particularly appropriate (or inappropriate) genre for American Indian/First Nations writers? Take notes during your discussion. Write a page or so as a group detailing your discussion. Make sure each person puts his or her name on the work. We will turn these in at the end of class, and I will pass them out so that we may finish them next time. December 6 --

#### Continue and Finish Group Work #4

Make sure to have all group members present sign the paper a second time for full credit.

Final discussion of the semester's readings

You are responsible for all assignments as noted on the syllabus and assignment sheets, including any additions or deletions I may make.

### NAS 2600 Native American Literature Fools Crow Project

For this major project, you will be responsible for \_\_\_\_ pages from the text; we will make page assignments in class through drawing names. There also may be pages available for bonus points. Each of you will define words and explain cultural and geographic aspects of the text on your assigned pages, including visual aids wherever applicable and culturally-appropriate. You will have a total of ten entries of your choice from the pages assigned. Come to class the next time with a list of your potential entries, ten words, phrases, or other aspects of the text you feel would be useful to explain for readers unfamiliar with Blackfoot culture or our Alberta/Montana landscape and her creatures. If you and another student both want the same entry, we will negotiate in class. In other words, have some backups in case someone other than you wants to explain Sun Dance, for instance. \*\*\*\*This project is to be turned in as an e-mail attachment in either Microsoft Word or Powerpoint, with images saved in JPEG format prior to class time on September 25-October 11, on the day you present. We will decide presentation dates based on numerical order of the pages. This is worth twenty-five percent of your grade. If the student chooses, her or his project may be submitted for publication in a website to be entitled "Digital Fools Crow -- Contextualizing James Welch's Novel."

Speaking of Sun Dance, for an example entry, I have included an article I wrote for the Encyclopedia of American Indian History, editors Barry Pritzker and Bruce Johansen from ABC-CLIO. If you get the entry on Sun Dance, you may use this as a source if you like; however, I would think in your entry you would want to cover a more Blackfoot-centered explanation, while at the same time avoiding giving too much detail in regard to ceremony, just as I had to do to write this article. In other words, I am also including this example to show how these things might be written on in a culturally-appropriate and respectful manner. In Native Studies, this is the proper protocol for us to follow. You will also notice I had an elder's permission and blessing and used him for my primary source.

One important difference between my article and your entries is that this article is nearly 1500 words long, while your entries will be between 150-300 words each, making your job much easier. You will need to include 3-5 visual aids as well. I would keep in mind, however, that those wanting an A' on this project should go the extra mile in terms of both length and quality, writing the maximum number of words rather than the minimum and including a good number of appropriate visual aids.

As I did, I expect you to include references and further readings. Use MLA format for any needed parenthetical references for page numbers. You need two to three sources, either oral or written, for each entry, and you need to credit sources for visual aids. You should use 12 pt. font, but format your entry as mine is otherwise. For a website or any electronic citation, consult <a href="http://www.mla.org/publicati">http://www.mla.org/publicati</a> ons/style/style\_faq/style\_faq4/.

In terms of the oral presentation itself, you will not have time to read aloud all of the information you will turn in to me with the previously e-mailed version of your document. Therefore, do not paste 150-300 words on each slide. Simply list the terms to guide your discussion, one per slide, add a visual aid if one of your three-to-five visual aids applies, along with a few bulleted items to help you speak extemporaneously, or "from the heart," in more Native terms, on each one. Your entire presentation should not exceed fifteen to twenty minutes (PRACTICE AND TIME YOURSELF!) You should plan on spending a minute to two minutes on each term.

Fifty percent of the grade for this project will be based on your written work, and fifty percent will be based on the oral presentation.

#### Sun Dance

Sun Dance is the central ceremony of the year for many of the Plains tribes. It is held among the Arapaho, Arikara, Assiniboine, Blackfoot/feet, Comanche, Crow, Eastern Dakota, Gros Ventre, Hidasta, Kiowa, Lakota, Mandan, Plains Cree, Plains Ojibwa, Sarsi, Shoshone, Siseton, Suhtai (Northern Cheyenne), Tsis-tsis-tas (Southern Cheyenne), and Ute. Recently, some Navajo have put up Sun Dance as well. Moreover, because of the questionable practice of selling Sun Dances, splinter groups of intertribal Indians, unaffiliated mixed bloods, and whites have been putting up Sun Dances in places such as Colorado and Texas among others. This practice is highly controversial.

From 1881-1934, Sun Dances were held secretly as it had been banned in both Canada and the United States. The Canadian Indian Act made it illegal in that county, and in the US, it was proscribed under the Court of Indian offenses after 1883. Even prior to government prohibition, Sun Dances had been discouraged by other means. The agent among the Blood band of the Blackfoot withheld rations and rendered other food ceremonially useless as well as preventing a traditional leader from getting employment to discourage the ceremony. Sun Dances without piercing began to be held more openly after the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 with its Circular No. 2970 on American Indian religious freedom, and those including piercing became less secret in the late 1950's. The tribal council at Pine Ridge even advertised a Sun Dance to tourists for a Fourth of July Fair.

Sun Dance is oldest among the Arapaho, Cheyenne, Crow, and Sioux, coming later to the other tribes. For the Lakota, it was brought by White Buffalo Calf Woman. For the Suhtai, by Erect Horns. For the Tsis-tsis-tas, Sweet Medicine brought the dance from the teachings given to him by the spirits inside of Bear Butte. Sun Dances are traditionally held among these tribes in the summer, usually either around the end of June or beginning of July or around the end of July and beginning of August. This is the time of year when berries ripen or chokecherries darken to fullness, the time the buffalo would traditionally be hunted and preserved.

The Sun Dance arbor is constructed each year anew around a central pole, the "Tree of Life," often ritually hunted and brought by one of the warrior societies. Shades made of tarps or other cloth cover the beams that fan out around the center pole creating the sacred circle in which the dancers will make their sacrifice. Around and on the central pole are highly sacred objects and sometimes prayer cloths. Buffalo, the lifeblood of the Plains, are essential to the ceremony for most at least in some way. The Blackfoot include the use of Sacred Tongues in the food blessed in the ceremony. Buffalo skulls are used both for prayer and for a piercing weight.

Some tribes do not pierce for various reasons. The Tsis-tsis-tas, who once engaged in this particular Sun Dance practice, no longer do so because, as Eugene Blackbear Sr., oldest living Tsis-tsis-tas Sun Dance leader says, "Once a way has been lost, we cannot bring it back without someone who is qualified to do it," in other words, an instructor who him or herself engaged in that practice as a dancer. For the Kiowa, piercing would violate a prohibition against shedding blood during the time of the ceremony. In tribes that pierce, skewers were put under the flesh and either tied to the central pole, to scaffolds, or to the buffalo skulls some supplicants drag behind them. Dancers who pierce will often have to ultimately remove the piercing through a flesh offering, by dancing up to and away from the pole until the skin rips and the skewer flies free. During the ritual, dancers will often do without food and water for up to four days. Led by their instructors, they will dance intermittently for days on end, blowing sacred eagle bone whistles at times. They may not leave the arbor except when given permission by their instructors for a break to urinate or for ceremonial purposes. In some tribes, only men dance. In others, dancing is done by both male and female supplicants. Among the Southern Cheyenne, women may fast, but do not dance.

The central purpose of the dance is for the renewal of life for the next year for the tribe, so that the tribe might overcome the obstacles to their survival and have plentiful food for the next year; it is a thanks, a giving back to the Creator for the blessings of the past year as well. It commemorates the creation of the world and acts to recreate it and the relationships within it annually. However, preparation for an individual Sun Dance supplicant begins with a vow to undertake the ceremony. Often, a vow is taken so that a relative might be healed from an ailment or safely returned from war or other separations. This vow might vary from one year to four years of Sun Dancing. The dancer must find an instructor qualified to lead him or her in the ceremony. The instructor will give up some of the medicine given to him or her in their years as a dancer.

Because of this, according to Blackbear, Cheyenne instructors will keep back "one paint" or transfer for themselves. Because of the notion of reciprocity in ceremony and in life that is an ideal in many tribes, those taking vows offer gifts to the instructors, both upon taking the vow and in the ritual itself. Often, the entire extended family of the dancer will spend nearly a year gathering and making the gifts; these include blankets, shawls, guns, horses, moccasins, and enamelware dishes and pots, among other items. A dancer will often have to find someone to cook during the ceremony for him or her as well, often several female relatives. Elaborate meals are given to the instructor and his or her family several times a day during the ceremony itself, and a larger feast is held after the dance ends including both the dancer's and instructor's families. In other tribes, cooking for those encamped and the instructors is done on the community level, women from various families chosen and volunteering to prepare food for all who attend.

Dancers often abstain sexual activity for a period of time before the ritual; in some tribes, celibacy will be practiced for a month to four months. In traditional Tsis-tsis-tas ways, the period was at one time four years. Moreover, in some tribes, they acquire a pipe for praying and taboos they must follow for the rest of their lives that accompany the medicine they are given through the dance. Often, dancers and instructors will pray prior to the dance in a sweat lodge for the purpose of purification. Another sweat follows in some tribes at the dance's conclusion. In some tribes, Sun Dance is preceded by other bundle ceremonies, such as Arrow Worship among the Tsis-tsis-tas, a men's ritual that women know nothing about. In others, such as the Lakota, individual supplicants go out on the hill seeking a vision prior to dancing.

For many tribal members, Sun Dance is a homecoming, just as it was a gathering of the bands in the pre-reservation era. The camp life of the ceremony provided time for traditional games, council meetings, and passing information to those one seldom saw. Young people traditionally and today see Sun Dance as an opportunity for courtship. Tents and RVs today help form the outer circle along with the tipis and bough covered cooking shades that once formed it alone. Those about the camp supporting dancers, visiting old friends and relatives, and engaging in various preparatory activities often have taboos they must follow as well, such as not wasting water or tossing it out carelessly. Drug and alcohol use is strictly prohibited and would constitute a major violation of the ceremonial space and the camp.

Menstruating women might be sent to a "moon lodge" in some tribes, while in others they should avoid the campground entirely as their power can interfere with that of the instructors. In some tribes, Sun Dance is a time to bring those born during the year into tribal life formally, some piercing children's ears and others conducting formal naming ceremonies. Despite the changes brought by time and colonization, Sun Dance religion remains vitally important to all aspects of life for those tribes that practice it. It perpetuates life and ideals such as generosity, bravery, and honesty, weaving the tribe together as a people and sustaining them.

#### --Kimberly Roppolo

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING:

Blackbear, Eugene Sr.. Personal interview. October 14, 2004.

Hirschfelder, Arlene and Paulette Molin, eds. Encyclopedia of Native American Religions. Updated ed. New York: Facts on File, Inc, 2000.

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Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

Markowitz, Harvey, ed. Ready Reference: American Indians. Vol. 1. Pasadena, California: Salem Press, Inc., 1995.