**American Indian Religious Traditions**

*Tink Tinker, Ph.D., Instructor*

*Spring 2016*

*Thursdays, 1 to 4:30 PM*

*Iliff Hall*

**Goal:**

This seminar will survey Native American religious traditions, both in terms of national specificity and in terms of general themes that appear in many national traditions, and learn to differentiate the worldview of Native American religious traditions from the all-encompassing euro-christian worldview that has come to dominate this continent and much of the modern, post-colonial world.

**Nature of the Course:**

"American Indian Religious Traditions" will follow a seminar style format, with as much time given to class discussion of prepared materials as to lectures delivered by the instructor. Our attempt will be to get at a beginning understanding of a variety of American Indian cultures and their religious traditions. We will also generate the beginnings of a model for trans-cultural understandings in general. In particular, we will try to identify the larger worldview that underscores the variety of Indian cultures. At the same time, we will rigorously differentiate the worldviews of the colonizer and the colonized.

As a result, this course does not intend to be merely classificatory or analytical in its learning style. Beyond the analytical, it will underscore the experiential aspect of learning, even (especially) with respect to the assigned texts—even as we studiously avoid New Age misappropriation of Native traditions as a different sort of the experiential.

Moreover, it needs to be said from the outset that this is not merely a history course intended to reconstruct the "way it was" for Indian peoples in the past. We will emphasize an understanding of the values, beliefs and religious traditions of Indian peoples in the present -- even when we are reading or discussing historical materials. An understanding of the past will thus form a foundation for understanding the present.

This seminar will survey Native American religious traditions from a selection of different national community contexts, using primarily materials written by members of those communities – in the form of ethnographies, critical essays, and fiction.

**Course Objectives:**

Students in this seminar will:

* Learn to differentiate at the level of worldview, especially differentiating the euro-christian worldview of the colonialist Self from the Native worldview of the Other.
* Learn familiarity with a variety of Native American religious structures – at both micro and macro levels.
* Examine the differentiation of traditions from a variety of indigenous national communities.
* Trace the similarities of relatively universal traditions that are shared in some form by many national Native communities.
* Engage Native American writers who deal with Native American religious traditions as insiders and practitioners and learn to make analytical comparisons between these interpretations and the “objective, scientific” observations of outsider experts.
* Develop a deeper understanding of the particularities with regard to the social, political and historical context of American Indian peoples and their religious traditions.
* Come to a deeper understanding of the ongoing effects of colonialism and conquest on contemporary American Indian societies and the practice of their religious traditions. These will be most acutely noticed in the structures imposed by the dominant society on indigenous peoples: the legal codes, political pressures, economic pressures, and social dysfunctionalities.
* Gain an appreciation of the particular strengths of American Indian cultures and their religious traditions and the constructive affects from these that could positively impact the greater society of North America.

**Reading Assignments:**

The readings are an integral part of our mutual preparation for class discussion each week. The reading list emphasizes Native American writers (but not exclusively, of course) instead of the usual academic experts from the fields of anthropology or history of religions. Our attempt will be to get inside of American Indian cultures through the participants themselves instead of through "trained" outside observers of the cultures. The required readings for the quarter are listed below. There is a book list at the top; then the articles and chapters (including several manuscripts) are posted in the syllabus. These can be found on our canvas site in pdf or MSWord format. Please have the readings completed for each class so that our discussions will be informed and helpful for all.

**Books:**

* Vine Deloria, Jr. *The World We Used to Live in* (Fulcrum. 2006).
* Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Thirty year anniversary edition: Fulcrum, 2003).
* Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisis* (Peter Lang, 2000).
* Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Viking, 1977).
* Russell Means, *If You’ve Forgotten the Names of the Clouds, You’ve Lost Your Way*. Treaty Publications, 2012.
* Albert White Hat, *Zuya*

Suggested Readings:

* Vine Deloria, Jr., *Spirit and Reason*, edited by Barbara Deloria and Sam Scinta (Fulcrum. 1999).
* \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Fulcrum, 1997.
* Garrick Bailey, *The* ***Osage and the Invisible World: From the Works of Francis La Flesche*** (Oklahoma Univ. Press, 1995). [This is good at some points; but misses a lot as well.]

**Written Assignments:**

There are several short essay assignments built into the syllabus throughout the quarter and a longer essay due at the end of the quarter. The short essays assigned for particular dates are to be turned in at the beginning of the class session on that date. They are intended to help you prepare for class discussion, hence they are of significantly less value if turned in late and must be graded down accordingly. The parameters for the final essay will be more fully described in class as the quarter proceeds.

It is important to remember that we are a master’s level seminar (with an occasional doctoral student in the mix) and that all our writing is, accordingly, to be an exercise in “*critical thought*.” It is expected that essays will be clearly focused and tightly argued. For each essay build your argument around one, clearly stated *thesis*. *Demonstrate* the validity of your thesis with plenty of evidence, examples, supporting arguments, and other warrants. To this end, I strongly encourage you to *annotate* your essays wherever appropriate. Moreover, I suggest that you not write for me, but focus on a reasonably intelligent audience who may or may not know much about the topic you address. When you make an assertion, even if I happen to agree with it, I will look for *substantiation* for the assertion and will critique you if it is lacking.

The final assignment is described at the bottom of the course outline on page 5.

**Grading:**

In addition to the written assignments, the final grade in the seminar will reflect class participation -- both in attendance and in active and informed participation in discussions. With respect to the former, the quarter is only ten weeks long. Thus, each class session missed represents ten percent of the total class. The essays will count for about 70% and participation for 30% in the final grade composition. Each missed class must affect the final grade; and if you sit without sharing through a class discussion, that must also affect the participation grade. You are master’s students; thus, you are expected to engage in verbal critical analysis of the literatures from week to week.

**Course Outline**

1. Thursday, March 24: **Tricksters and Culture Heroes**

Read (in preparation for our first class):

* Russell Means, *If You’ve Forgotten the Names of the Clouds, You’ve Lost Your Way*. Treaty Publications, 2012. This is a small book that reads fairly easily.
* TT, “Columbus & Coyote: A Comparison of Culture Heroes in Paradox.” *Apuntes* (1992): 78-88. Posted on our canvas site as a manuscript text (MSWord).
* TT: “A Note on Language and Translation.” Preface to an unpublished volume that TT has been working on for some years. All chapters will be posted on our canvas site as manuscripts in process (MSWord). This is a short but critical document for our seminar.

2. March 31:  **Cultural Differentiation: The Land, Time and Space**

* Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Thirty year anniversary edition: Fulcrum, 2003). Pp. 1-75.
* Barbara Mann, “Forward” and “Introduction,” *Iroquoian Women*, pp. xix-10.

1. April 7: **Worldview**

* Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, pp. 76 to end.
* B. Mann, Ch. 1

**Assignment:** Write an 800-1000 word review of Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Thirty year anniversary edition: Fulcrum, 2003). What is Deloria’s thesis? And how do you personally wrestle with the arguments he summons to argue his thesis? By “wrestle” I mean intellectually, analytically and not merely emotionally.

1. April 14: **God or Not-God**

* TT: “*wakonda*: God, gods, Spirit and Power.” Unpublished book: Chapter One.
* TT: “Why I Don’t Believe in a Creator,” in *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*, edited by Steve Heinrichs. Herald Press, 2013. Pp. 167-179.

1. April 21: **Spirit, Spirits, Energy, and the *wakon***

* B. Mann, Ch. 2.
* TT, “Spirits: *wakon* Energy.”

# TT, “Consciousness: Rocks and Indians.”

* M. Annette Jaimes with Theresa Halsey. "American Indian Women." In *State of Native America*, 311-344. Posted on canvas.

1. April 28: **Land, Place, and Spatiality**

* TT, “Land and Sacred Sites: Deloria and the Native Sense of Place.” Unpublished book: Chapter Four.
* Barbara Mann, Chapters Three and Four

1. May 5: **A Warrior Culture????**

* TT, “War and Warfare: The Mitigation of Violence.” Unpublished book: Chapter Seven.
* TT, Non-Violence
* Barbara Mann, *Iroquoian Women*, Chapter Five.

1. May 12: **Healing, Power, Ceremony and Gender**

* Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (Viking, 1977). This novel is one of the finest ways to learn about Indian culture and religious traditions. The reading is very complex and merits re-reading in order to let the complexities soak into one’s consciousness. Please begin reading early in the quarter. *Ceremony* is widely read in Indian communities yet today.

**Assignment**: Reflect on and write a short (900-1200 words) essay on the following question: The symbolism of "woman" is significant throughout this novel. What might that symbol signify or mean? Please demonstrate your argument with citations from the text; and please feel free to use other readings we have shared in this seminar to date. Due electronically before class.

1. May 19: **Living Traditions**

* Vine Deloria, Jr. *The World We Used to Live in* (Fulcrum. 2006).
* TT essays

1. May 26: ***Zuya***

**Final Assignment**:

1. Write a ten or twelve page essay (2000 to 3000 words) reflecting on what you consider to be a striking and important aspect of this seminar’s subject matter using the parameters spelled out here.
2. Pick four of the short vignette scenarios from Russell Means short volume. Discuss the issue he addresses in the broader context of all the other readings we have done and discussions we have had in class through this quarter, engaging a comparative analysis. That is, compare what Means presents with what others have written or talked about. Is there a sense of Indian cultural value commonality that seems to be coalescing?
3. How do these American Indian values differ from the value system of the euro-christian world? How do you understand the differentiation between the worldview of American Indians from that of the euro-christian settler class?
4. Please do distinguish carefully and analytically between worldview and ideology—even as you identify ideologies that appear to move towards a Native worldview.