

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGION, Fall 2008

REL142 (24087) Section M001

202 HL, WF 8 to 9:20 AM

Professor Philip P. Arnold

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Office Hours: MW 10:30-11:30 and by appointment

Papers posted on Blackboard (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>)

TA: Soonki Lee

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Office hours: F 10:40-11:40 and by appointment

Introduction:

It has been 500 years since Europeans contacted America's indigenous inhabitants and many Native Americans claim they are still misunderstood and disrespected. We will learn about the religious life of Native Americans as it is revealed through the contact between various European and Indigenous cultural groups throughout the Americas by emphasizing the distinctive meanings of land. Readings focus on Mesoamerican, Lakota (i.e., Sioux), and Haudenosaunee (i.e., Iroquois) traditions written by a historian of religions, a poet, and Native American writers. We conclude with a book by the famous historian of religions, Huston Smith, who asks the question, "Why hasn't the freedom of religion ever applied to Native American people?" At the end of the class we look at the crisis points between Native American traditions and American culture.

In the next six weeks you may be able to visit a variety of Native American places and events in our area organized by traditional Iroquois people. For the most part these field trips will be for extra credit held on campus and thus be easily accessible, or will be arranged informally by Professor Arnold.

Objectives:

Native American religions present to us a variety of challenges having to do with our Modern American identity. As such, my objectives are that by the end of the course you be able to seriously ask and reflect on a series of questions of deep significance. By the end of the class we will begin to wonder what it really means to be an American. Our highly individualistic understanding of "religion" will begin to be challenged when confronted with Native American traditions. Can we really say that land, as well as other aspects of our material life, are just "natural resources" or do Native people have a more viable way of thinking and expressing the full range of humanity by referring to the land as *Pachamama*, *Turtle Island*, or *Mother Earth*?

Required Texts:

José Barreiro (editor), [Indian Roots of American Democracy](#)

David Carrasco, [Religions of Mesoamerica](#)

Ronald Goodman, [Lakota Star Knowledge](#)

John Neihardt, [Black Elk Speaks](#)

Leon Shenandoah & Steve Wall, [To Become a Human Being](#)

Huston Smith and Phil Cousineau, [A Seat at the Table](#)

Books are available at the University Bookstore. Readings are also available at the Reserve Desk of Bird Library.

Course Goals:

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In accordance with the Department of Religion this class has four major goals that shape its teaching and its expectations of what students expect to gain from this course:

1. to think both critically and imaginatively about the nature of religion as a basic response to and expression of the human condition in America;

2. to recognize and appreciate the difficulties and possibilities inherent in undertaking a coherent, disciplined study of religion; and to become aware of the diversity of perspectives within that study;

3. to come to a distinct yet corrigible conception of "religion," and to be able to recognize its appearance not only within the historical institutions of diverse religious traditions, but also in other social/cultural forms;

4. to develop an understanding of key instances in the diversity of human religious history, phenomena, and experience; and to achieve a fluency in interpreting and describing them.

Date	Topics	Reading Assignments
<u>August</u>		
27	Introductions-What are Native American Religions?	
29	What is Religion?	Smith & Cousineau, Intro, chs. 1 & 2
29	Native American Day at the Great New York State Fair (Free admission for Native Americans)	
<u>September</u>		
3	What are people for?	Carrasco: Preface and Chapter I
5	Mesoamerican worldrenewal	Carrasco: Chapter II
10	The Aztec world	Carrasco: Chapter III
12	The Maya	Carrasco: Chapter IV
17	Post-colonial religion	Carrasco: Chapter V
19	The Great Vision	BES Intro. & chs. I - VI
22	Paper #1 Due on the Discussion Board	
24	Long Hair and Crazy Horse	BES chs. VII - XIII
26	Performing vision	BES chs. XIV - XVIII
<u>October</u>		
1	Ghost Dance and Wounded Knee	BES chs. XIX - XXV
3	The Lakota sky	Goodman, Preface & chs. 1 - 4
8	Sacrifice and Life	Goodman, chs. 5 - 8 & Appendices
10	MIDTERM	
15	Becoming human beings	Shenandoah, pp. 12-45
17	The Haudenosaunee pathway	Shenandoah, pp. 46-90

Date	Topics	Assignments
22	First words	Barreiro, Introduction and pgs 10-19
24	Finding balance	Barreiro, pp. 20-46
29	Forgotten Founders	Grinde in Barreiro, pp. 47-66
31	Roots of Democracy	Venables in Barreiro, pp. 67-106
<u>November</u>		
5 134	Women's rights	Roesch-Wagner in Barreiro, pp. 107-
7	Wampum: sacred texts?	Barreiro, pp. 135-177
12	Haudenosuanee voices at the UN	Readings on Blackboard
14	Sacred places and cultural crisis	Smith & Cousineau, chps. 3 & 4
17	Paper #2 due on the Discussion Board	
19	Native Languages and religion	Smith & Cousineau, chps. 5 & 6
21	Prisons and Human Genome Project	Smith & Cousineau, chps. 7 & 8
26-28 Thanksgiving—no classes		
<u>December</u>		
3	Mt. Graham and Spiritual Law	Smith & Cousineau, chps. 9 & 10
5	Community values	Smith & Cousineau, chp. 11 & Afterword
FINAL EXAMINATION Thursday, 11 December, 7:15-9:15 PM; location TBA		

Grading:

Final grades will be based on papers, midterms and final exams, attendance and class participation.

Papers: You are required to post 2 papers on the Blackboard website (<http://blackboard.syr.edu>). Due dates are on the syllabus. The papers should be from 500 to 1000 words long (about 2 to 4 pages). Each paper is to be on a topic posted on the Discussion board forum on Blackboard a week before the paper is due. The papers are intended to generate discussion so **you are required to read the papers of other students and respond to at least two other papers.**

Your papers will be graded on a sliding scale. Exceptionally well crafted papers that are equivalent to the letter grade 'A' are worth 12-15 points each; 'B' papers are worth 8-11 points; 'C' papers are worth 4-7 points; and 'D' papers are worth 1-3 points; and failing papers are worth 0 points. You will receive 0 points, if you do not hand the papers in on time or if your paper fails to address the issues presented in the assigned topic. In addition, you are required to respond to two other papers on the discussion board for which you will receive 5 additional points. Responses to other papers are due on the following Monday after the papers have been posted. You can receive up to 20 points for each paper for a total of 40 points for the semester. Both papers are due to be posted on a Monday. You will have up until a week after posting your paper to respond to two other papers.

Below are three criteria that we will use when grading your written work.

- 1) **Clarity.** The viewpoints you present in your writing must be clearly conceived and well argued. Your writing style should be straight-forward, easy to read and should be clearly related to the issues you wish to address. Topic sentences at the beginning of each paragraph are helpful in establishing the issue and argument for the reader at the outset. (40%)
- 2) **Engagement with the material.** Entries are to be related to the reading material. They are *not reviews* of what has been stated in the book but are your *critical analysis* of the reading. Avoid direct quotes. Instead seriously take-up what you consider to be the 'key' issues for the study of religion in the reading. An analysis of the issues discussed in the course become clearer the closer your writing is to the texts used in class. (40%)
- 3) **Creativity.** The 'work' of Religious Studies, and perhaps the Humanities in general, is essentially creative. Interpretation of religious phenomena requires that you come to some meaningful relationship with your object of study. This is one of the defining characteristics of creativity. You have a unique and important contribution to make to our collective understandings. There are no predetermined experts in the area of interpretation, only well refined and well argued positions. Your interpretations will be dealt with as importantly as you regard them yourself. (20%)

Midterm and Final Exams: There are midterm and final exams for this class. These are in-class exams and the date and time of the exams are clearly marked on

the syllabus. Both exams will be a combination of short identifications and essay questions. They will cover aspects of the class based primarily on the reading

Attendance and class participation: Attendance is mandatory for this class. Role will be taken. After two unexcused absences you will be deducted two points for every unexcused absence. Lectures and reading will be intimately related to each other but quite different. It is therefore in your own best interest to do the reading and attend class as both will reflect on your performance on discussion topic papers and the final. You will be given regular opportunities to participate in class either by asking questions, making comments, and interacting with other students.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

Papers	40 points
Midterm exam	20 points
Final exam	30 points
Attendance and class participation	10 points

Extra credit: There are a number of events during this semester that you may use as extra credit opportunities. If you attend one or more of these events and write about your experience of these events and post these short papers on Blackboard you will receive up to 3 points each. There will be a maximum of 3 extra credit opportunities for each person. Several of these events are marked on the syllabus but there may be other events too. Please inform the class if you know of additional events not announced.