

AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIONS and ECOLOGY
REL 918 / [RLST](#) /RLST/F&ES 876 / EVST 280

Fall 2010

Room: ISPS A002
Instructor: John Grim
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Course Time: Tues 2:30-5:20 a.m.
Office Hours: TBA
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This course approaches the histories, thought and religious traditions of American Indian peoples as providing significant insights into human-Earth relations. In that sense, these diverse and changing traditions raise interesting and challenging perspectives on environmental questions of the 21st century. For example, what is the role(s) of local environments in the formation of self and community? Does the relational character of traditional religion among American Indian communities have contemporary force? Religion is not a separate set of practices among Native American peoples; rather, religion is explored in this course as lifeway. That is, life lived in relation to local place in which languages, symbol systems, and rituals give expression to the intimacy and distance of communities with local ecology and biodiversity. We will primarily explore North American Indian religious life with some attention to indigenous Inuit peoples of the Arctic.

Recent archaeological finds throughout the Americas, especially New England, Florida, and Peru, suggest that settlement of this hemisphere, or "Turtle Island" as many Native North Americans term the continents, may have been much more varied than previously thought. The long-accepted view of migrations of peoples exclusively across the Bering Strait and along an ice-free corridor opened in the last Ice Age (ca. 10,000 years ago) is now challenged. Migrations of First Peoples may have come across the North Atlantic Ocean, by canoes or ships along the Northwestern Pacific coast, as well as by transoceanic voyages of Polynesian peoples across the Pacific, and now island-hopping passages are conjectured in the northern Atlantic.

Indigenous peoples inhabited local regions of North America for thousands of years prior to the European migrations and invasions of this "New World." These First Nations undoubtedly moved extensively over different bioregions of the continent, and interacted in many instances with local regions for millennia. Traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) can be understood as a significant factor in the emergence of the contemporary American landscape. Moreover, Native Peoples have been intimately involved in the political history of the Americas, even though contributions of the Indigenous peoples are often grudgingly acknowledged in local, state, and national histories. While not exclusively a course in the history of American Indian peoples, these events and insights frame many of the socio-religious and environmental questions for this course. Consider, for example, how little we learn of African and American Indian interactions let along the environmental implications of those exchanges.

Finally, reflexive questions frame some of our opening investigations. For example, what is it that we learn about ourselves when we study other religious traditions? Do we undertake this critical project to learn about alternative human-Earth relationships? Can we study the worldviews, rituals and ecological values of Native American peoples with respect if at the same time we as a country know little of the American Indian quest for "voice" in governing their own lives? What insights emerge in an critical examination of such terms as "American," "Indian," "religions," and "ecology."

Course Objectives:

- to introduce students to the plurality and diversity of indigenous peoples, languages, cultures, and relationships with ecosystems in North America.
- to investigate the concept of “lifeways” as an approach in which indigenous religious ideas and practices are not separated from such spheres as economics, politics, and social life.
- to study the connections between religious beliefs and practices of Native American societies with local environments in such diverse expressions as origin myths, cosmologies, sacred sites, symbol systems, archaeoastronomy, and rituals.
- to explore the traditional environmental knowledge (TEK) and broader indigenous knowledge (IK) with which American Indians have shaped and been shaped by bioregions.

Course Description:

This course will focus on the religious expressions of American Indian peoples of the North American continent from the standpoint of their diverse relationships with local lands and biodiversity. The term, lifeway, and the phrase, religious ecology, are used to refer to two different approaches to the ways that native peoples understand their relatedness to reality. A cultural-historical method will be used in conjunction with comparative-thematic and worldview approaches. These approaches emphasize different ways of understanding of native continuities in relationships with bioregions over time. Comparisons will also be drawn between Native American traditions and different world religions. This course also highlights traditional environmental knowledge using such themes as giving, reciprocity, and personhood.

A lecture-conversation format will be used in the Monday-Wednesday meetings along with discussion of readings in smaller class groups. The readings listed below in the “Course Calendar” suggest topics and questions for those discussions.

Videos are scheduled as an integral part of this course. You will be expected to view and write reaction essays to these videos on Native American religions and contemporary life. Some of these videos are available in the Film Library at Whitney Humanities Center.

Course Grading

Undergraduate requirements differ from graduate requirements –

Undergraduate: there will be a **Mid-term exam and a Final exam** in this course. Each exam will be a **Take-Home** with three essay questions each, and a week is given for completion.

Graduates: option 1 - two papers of 12-20 pages on topics determined by the graduate student and the instructor. They may be used accumulatively to explore a single topic and/or Native American people; Option 2 - a **Mid-term exam and a Final exam**, each exam will be a **Take-Home** with four essay questions each.

News Event Each student will be expected to report in class on one contemporary news event from a newspaper, magazine, or journal that relates to contemporary Native American peoples. This contemporary "new event" report must be given in class.

Video Requirement: Three (3) written responses to videos are due over the semester. These two to three (2-3) page discussions must be completed: the first by the week 3 (Sept. 15th), the second by week 7 (Oct. 26th), and the third before the final week of the course (Nov. 30th). These responses should draw out your observations about the religion and ecology in Native American life especially insights that are new to you. I will be evaluating your capacity to view the videos using the “dimensions” and approaches to the study of religion and ecology as discussed in class.

Required Course Texts

Winona LaDuke, All Our Relations South End Press
 James McNeley, Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, U of AZ Press
 Richard Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven, U of Chicago Press
 Tim McCleary, The Stars We Know, Waveland Press
 John Loftin, Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, Indiana U Press
 Viola F. Cordova, How It Is: the Native American Philosophy of V.F.Cordova, U of AZ Press

Electronic Articles Available Online at Yale Library to Students – not all required of undergraduates – all required articles online

Grim, John, "American Indian Religions: Cultural Identity, Authenticity, and Community Survival." for Special Issue of the *American Indian Quarterly* on Native American Spirituality edited by Lee Irwin, Vol. 20, Nos. 3&4, Summer & Fall, 1996: pages 353-376. (published July 1997); also in **Native American Spirituality: A Reader**. Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 2000: pages 37-60.

John Grim, "Cosmogony and the Winter Dance: Salishan Ethics in Transition," *Journal of Religious Ethics*. Volume 20/2, Fall 1992: 389-413.

Anne-Christine Hornborg, "On the Phenomenological Foundation of Indian Romanticism," chap. 2 in **Mi'kmaq landscapes : from animism to sacred ecology**

N. Scott Momaday, "The Man Made of Words," in **Native American Traditions: Sources and Interpretations** Edited by Sam Gill, Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 1983: 44-53.

Kieth Basso, "'Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache," in ***Text, play and story*** ed Edward M. Bruner, Waveland Press, 1988.

Lee Irwin, "Culture, Dreams, and Theory," pages 9-25, and "Greater Plains Cosmography," pages 26-55 both from ***The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains***, Norman : University of Oklahoma Press, 1994.

Gregory Cajete, 'Singing Waters: The Environmental Foundation of Indigenous Education," in ***Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*** Durango, CO: Kivaki Press, 1994: 74-114.

Jace Weaver, "Notes from a Miner's Canary," pages 11-28 and George Tinker, "An American Indian Theological Response to Ecojustice," pages 153-176 in *Defending Mother Earth: Native American perspectives on Environmental Justice* edited by Jace Weaver, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Al Gedicks, "The Corporate/Government Appeal to Racism," and Defending Indian Treaties, Defending the Earth," in *The New Resource Wars*," Boston: South End Press, 1993.

Charlotte Black Elk, "A Song from Sacred Mountain: Lakota-Dakota and Cheyenne Interviews," pages 105-107 and Robert Williams, Jr., "Large Binocular Telescopes, Red Squirrel Pinatas, and Apache Sacred Mountains: Decolonizing Environmental Law in a Multicultural World.," pages 126-145 in *Readings in American Indian Law: Recalling the Rhythm of Survival*, Edited by Jo Carrillo, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998.

Course Calendar

September 6 - Introductory remarks, syllabus - "Dimensions in the Study of Religion"
– **note:** these “dimensions” of religion can be used as approaches to the study of religion in video reports

September 8 -

September 14 - **read: All Undergraduates and Graduates** – Cordova vii-45 ;and Grim, “Cultural Identity, Authenticity, and Community Survival: The Politics of Recognition in the Study of Native American Religions”

read: Graduates Only Grim, "Cosmogony and the Winter Dance” **both articles are available online at Classes v2 and Yale Library**

[What are the “politics of recognition?” How do you understand “cultural identity,” “authenticity,” and “community survival?” In what ways would these ideas enter in our study of Native American religions? How have elders on reservations already demonstrated concern for these issues?

What religious ideas and values are both uniquely expressed by particular Native American peoples as well as shared among different indigenous societies? Think about the Winter Dance, why is it practiced at this time of year? What relationship does it establish between these Salish peoples and their bioregion? How do you understand the "remembering and forgetting" of sacred songs? What cultural purpose could it serve?]

September 21 **read: All** - N. Scott Momaday, “The Man Made of Words,” and Cordova 48-83; and Winona LaDuke, All Our Relations, pp. 1-70.

[In what way does Momaday link the imaginative act to land? In what way can we call this a “religious ecology?” What insights does Winona LaDuke provide in All Our Relations into the

historical and environmental encounters of traditional peoples in North America with Europeans and dominant America? What are the linkages between Momaday's and LaDuke's reflections?]

September 28 – **All read:** Charlotte Black Elk, "A Song from Sacred Mountain: Lakota-Dakota and Cheyenne Interviews" **online**, and Winona LaDuke, All Our Relations, pp. 72-111 and 138-162

Graduates Irwin, "Culture, Dreams, and Theory," and "Greater Plains Cosmography"

[How does Charlotte Black Elk associate Lakota philosophical principles with Bear Butte? In what way might a ritual practice actually give rise to new, creative directions among a traditional people? Relate one of the case studies in All Our Relations to a traditional lifeway.]

October 5 – **All read:** and LaDuke, All Our Relations, pp. 187-200; and Cordova 85-129;

Graduates Al Gedicks, "The Corporate/Government Appeal to Racism," and Defending Indian Treaties, Defending the Earth,"

[Describe Amiotte's opening experiences that prompted him to undertake "crying for a vision." What are the ritual roles of Petaga? What formal structures do you observe in this ritual? How do these structures relate to Lakota religion/lifeway? In All Our Relations LaDuke points towards alternative energy sources available on Native American lands – are they viable?]

October 12 - [Images of Crow Sun Dance] **All read** McCleary, The Stars We Know, pp. xi – 50

[Does the Crow/Apsaalooke "Sun Dance" manifest a religious ecology? How do preparations enhance the religious meaning of the Sun Dance for Heywood Big Day and the Crow people? How does the "ritual process" of this ceremonial relate to Crow lifeway?]

October 19 - **All read:** McCleary, The Stars We Know, pp. 52 – 112;

Graduates Cajete, 'Singing Waters: The Environmental Foundation of Indigenous Education,"

[What relationship do the Crow have to *ihké aléwahkuua*, "the stars we know?" What types of relationships are established with the star peoples by means of oral narratives? How does Crow star-knowledge relate to the insights presented by Cajete?]

**** Mid -Term Exam ****

October 26 – **All read:** Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, pp. vii -75; and Simon Ortiz, with a poem by Adrian Louis, "Empowerment,"

Graduates Wall and Masayesva, "People of the Corn: Teachings in Hopi Traditional Agriculture, Spirituality, and Sustainability,"

[What does Loftin mean by "religious practicality?" What are Hopi social forms that have spiritual meaning and why? What roles do prayer and ritual have in binding the Hopi people together and to their bioregion? Distinguish Hopi worldview values.]

November 2 - All read: Religion and Hopi Life in the 20th Century, pp. vii -75-123; and Cordova 131-179

Graduates "On the Phenomenological Foundation of Indian Romanticism," chap. 2 in *Mi'kmaq landscapes : from animism to sacred ecology*

[Hopi thought about "prophecy" is dense and the ideas are rich. Develop your own interpretive position on Hopi "prophecy." How have contemporary issues such as resource mining and self-development entered into Hopi religious life? In what way is Hopi prophecy an ethical teaching for these First Peoples?]

November 9 - All read: McNeley, Holy Wind in Navajo Philosophy, pp. ix – 61; and Anderson, "When I close my eyes and think of my home place,"

[What kinds of concerns does McNeley have about "informants," "language," and "social linguistics? What does *ní lch'I hwii'sizinií* mean? What does McNeley mean by "concordance method" for bringing together different statements about a religious idea from different individuals he interviewed?]

What is a "Wind Soul" according to McNeley's construction of Navajo thought? What is the role of the origin myth, and chantways in Navajo thought? What roles does Wind have in the origin time? ...in present time?]

What is the relationship of Wind to the individual Navajo person? Describe the ethical relationship of Wind with individual Navajo? Clarify for yourself Navajo psychological and cosmological thinking about Wind?]

November 16 – All read: Nelson, Make Prayers to the Raven xiii – 115 **Graduates** Basso, "Stalking with Stories': Names, Places, and Moral Narratives among the Western Apache,"

[Distinguish Dene peoples of the northern SubArctic and in the southwest. Where are the Koyukon people located? What is Nelson's personal position on this study in relation to earlier such studies? What is the Koyukon view of the human in the natural world? What is the spiritual power for the Koyukon and where is it located?

Explain the ethics embedded in *hutlaanee*? In what way is *hutlaanee* a conservation ethics? Select one realm of the animal or plant realm and be prepared to talk about Koyukon relations with that realm. In what way can narratives function as a moral compass?]

November 30 – read: Make Prayers to the Raven 116 – 253; Cordova 181-232

Final Exam given out

[What are some Koyukon subsistence patterns that have implications for the conservation of their local ecology? How do these ideas and practices relate to the Koyukon worldview?]

VIDEOS

Suggested Sequence for Videos – * You Can Choose Any Video At Any Time *

In addition to these videos, a report on a section of these CD's also qualify: "The American Indian," "Microsoft's 500 Nations," "Indian Question," "The Native Americans," "Wiyuta: Assiniboine Storytelling with Signs" and others – check with instructor

Week 1 - In Light of Reverence – the most significant film available on “sacred sites.”

Week 2 - "River people: behind the case of David Sohappy" [Powerful video discussion of the relentless investigation, persecution, and conviction of a Yakima elder who stood up to the Washington state Fish and Game Dept.] or **"To protect Mother Earth: broken treaty II"** [The latter is a powerful discussion of the fight of the Western Shoshone, focused on two sisters, to save their lands from being sold by their guardian, the Sec. of the Interior, to the U.S. Government.] or **In Light of Reverence**. Also, consider one of the three films by Iroquois filmmaker Danny Beaton, namely, **Mohawk Wisdom Keepers, Iroquois Thanksgiving, Indigenous Restoration: A Concert**. I also have films of talks by the Haudenosaunee Faithkeeper, Oren Lyons, that make excellent video reports – ask for my personal video copy.

Week 3 - Either **"In the Spirit of Crazy Horse"** or **"Live and Remember,"** or **"Fulfilling the Vision,"** [Distinguish the connections made in these videos between rituals, spiritual power and Lakota identity. What event happened at Wounded Knee that is so important to contemporary Lakota identity?] or **"Incident at Oglala"** or **"Thunderheart"** [These are feature films that attempt to describe the intense pressures on traditional Lakota peoples during and before the Wounded Knee siege.]

Week 4 - **"Dakota Conflict"** [What happened during the 1860s in the area now called Minnesota that is described in this video?] Or **Lakota Woman: Siege at Wounded Knee** (1994). [An account of the 1970s American Indian Movement occupation at Wounded Knee.]

Week 5 - **"Crow/Shoshone Sun Dance"** [Relate this video to Crummett's description of the Crow Sun Dance, or to McCleary's discussion of Crow star knowledge.]

Week 6 - **"Popol Vuh: The Creation Myth of the Maya,"** [Relate this beautiful cartoon telling of the Mayan creation myth video to Carrasco's discussion of death, sacrifice, blood-letting, and heroic personalities in Mesoamerican religions.] **"Voices from the present"** [Discussion of the “Mayan Movement” among contemporary Guatemalan Mayan peoples to find political voice after the harsh realities of persecution. Consider Mel Gibson’s **Apocalypto**]

Week 7 - "**The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico,**" or "**Mexico the rise and fall of the Aztecs**" [Discussion of the Spanish-Aztec struggle in the 1520s especially Tenochtitlan.]

Week 8 - "**Hopi, songs of the fourth world**" [An important video describing the lifeway of Hopi peoples.]

Week 9 - "**Indian pottery of San Ildefonso**" [Discussion of the process of pottery in a Southwestern pueblo.] Or "**The Sunrise dance**" [Magnificent film describing the Western Apache girl's puberty ceremony.]

Week 10 - "**Wisconsin Powwows**" and "**Namakaaged: Dancer for the People**" [Excellent discussions of powwow dancing circuit focused on Wisconsin Reservations.]

Week 11 - "**Enduring Ways of the Lac du Flambeau Ojibway**" [Beautiful discussion of the seasons and lifeway of contemporary Lac du Flambeau Ojibway peoples.] **Nokomis: Conversations with Anishinabe Grandmothers**

Week 12 - "**Broken rainbow**" [Award winning video focused on the removal of 12,000 Navajo from the Joint Use Area in dispute with Hopi peoples.] "**In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports**" [A graphic examination of racism in sports.]

Week 13- "**The Honour of all**" [A powerful set of films documenting the fight against alcohol among a Shuswap village group in British Columbia.] "**The Peyote Road**" [Discussion of the recent legislative assault against the Native American Peyote Church.] "**Circle of the Spirit: a saga of Native peoples and the Catholic Church,**" view, "**The First Americans,**" or "**The Ancestors early cultures of North America**" or "**Myths and moundbuilders**" [Distinguish pre-contact civilizations in America: Adena, Hopewell, Anasazi, Hohokam, Mogollon, Mississippian.] or "**Spirit in the Hole**" [Why have Native American rituals been disallowed in prisons? What has been the effect of allowing native rituals in the "hole?"]

