

# American Indian Religious Traditions

AKA: Living Traditions of Peoples Indigenous to Regions  
Currently Encompassed by the United States and Canada,  
including and especially Hawai'i

## Religious Studies 2700 // Ethnic Studies 2703 (Spring 2017)

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 11-12 in the Center for Native American and Indigenous Studies, 1330-32  
Grandview; Wednesday, 1-2 in my office, Eaton Humanities 280

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**Purpose of Course:** This introductory course explores the religious traditions of peoples indigenous to the Americas, with particular attention to the native peoples now encompassed by the United States and Canada. Our historical view will range from before Columbus to the present, with special attention to issues of "culture contact." In order to develop a broad understanding of the religious lives of Native Americans, First Nations peoples and Native Hawaiians, our analyses will take us to a diversity of places, from the frozen landscapes of the Arctic to the warm waters of Polynesia. We will then focus upon the rituals and oral traditions of several specific tribes/nations/groups. Doing so, we will engage in close studies of Ute, Navajo, Kwakiutl, Makah, and Kanaka Maoli (Hawaiian) cultures. The next section of the course proceeds thematically, as we explore modern and contemporary religious movements, including the Sun Dance, Ghost Dance, the Native American Church, repatriation and religious freedom issues, and powwow events. We will conclude our adventure by way of a literary excursion, reading the difficult but rewarding novel by N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*. Throughout the semester we will track and discuss unfolding political and religious disputes of relevance, including actions at Standing Rock the contested case hearing regarding Mauna Kea in Hawai'i.

### **Required Texts:**

- Black Elk and Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*.
- Johnson, *Sacred Claims*.
- Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*.
- Course reader, available at CU Bookstore.

**Assignments and Grading:** This course is based on a 100 point system. The grade scale is as follows: less than 60=F; 60-62.5=D-; 62.6-67.5=D; 67.6-69.9=D+; 70.0-72.5=C-; 72.6-77.5=C; 77.6-79.9=C+; 80.0-82.5=B-; 82.6-87.5=B; 87.6-89.9=B+; 90.0-92.5=A-; 92.6-100=A.

**Participation: (20%)** The success of this course depends upon you being present, in all senses. Read, think, arrive ... and share your ideas. Please arrive promptly for lecture and turn off all electronic devices, including computers. Syllabus modifications, assignments, and special events will be addressed at the very beginning of each period and will not be repeated. Attendance in recitation is mandatory; your grade will drop by **one point** for every session you miss. Attendance in recitation constitutes 10 points (10%) of your grade. This may not sound stringent, but some quick math will clarify matters. If, for example, your pre-attendance grade is 93.0 (A) and you miss once, your new grade is 92.0 (A-). If your pre-attendance grade is 90.0 (A-) and you miss once, your new grade is 89.0 (B+). If you miss three times it would become 87.0 (B). Beyond attendance, though linked to it, a subjective assessment of your participation will account for another 10% of your final grade. For your participation and attendance grades you begin the semester with full points. Regular attendance, a heartbeat, and some potent brainwave activity (preferably linked in regular and reasonable ways to your vocal cords) are all you need to retain your points. Irregular attendance and clear disengagement will work in the opposite direction. Be

clear on this point: if you miss recitation frequently, you will be damaging your attendance and your participation grade simultaneously. For example, if you miss four times and your participation is graded in a corresponding manner (e.g., 7.5), your overall grade drops by 6.5 points—e.g., 83.0 (B) would become 76.5 (C), a full letter grade drop.

**Web assignments:** You will be asked to check **indianz.com** (or other Indigenous news sources) daily before class. Print at least one story for each week and bring it to recitation. Keep a file of your printed stories for exam preparation. Come to recitation prepared to discuss issues of relevance. Additionally, a formal web-based assignment will be given during the semester. This is designed to stimulate independent research and general interest. The work involved in this assignment is easy and fun—it amounts to surfing the web. However, the results of your work are important, as what you discover will fuel our class discussions. Additionally, please follow Standing Rock and Mauna Kea issues on social media.

**Papers: (30%)** You are responsible for **three** papers written in response to topics given in class throughout the semester. Dates and events (when relevant) for **ten** assignment topics appear in the syllabus. Additional paper topics may be assigned, but that is not guaranteed, and out-of-class events may be canceled or rescheduled. Your typed responses are due in class as specified. **If you write four papers, your lowest grade will be dropped.** Each paper represents 10 points, 10% of your final grade. Clear, well-formulated answers of 3-4 double-spaced pages are expected. You should refer to any relevant textual materials and address the questions in specific terms that demonstrate your familiarity with the information and issues. No late or emailed papers will be accepted.

**Exams: (50%)** There will be a mid-term and a final examination. The mid-term exam will count for 20% of your grade, the final counts for 30%. These exams will be based on essay questions. In the class period prior to each exam we will discuss likely essay questions. There will be no make-up exams unless the student can show proof of extenuating circumstances.

**Extra credit:** Extra credit is not offered in this course. If you follow the syllabus and attend to your assignments, you will not need additional points. However, you are strongly encouraged to attend out of class events. CU and Boulder boast rich networks of people and groups devoted to American Indian cultures and causes. Diligent students will find ample opportunities to attend lectures, dances, symposia, concerts, and other events. If you attend an event, you might find ways to mention it in recitation, a paper, or in an exam answer (e.g., “On the question of Indian identities, the presentation by Important Person at Impressive Event was illuminating in the following ways...”). On a related note, if you become aware of an event that has not been mentioned in class, please bring it to Professor Johnson’s attention.

### **Course outline and reading assignments:**

#### **Wednesday, January 18.**

1. Introduction to course. What are we doing? Why does it matter? Establishing perspective: critical vision, present orientation. Introduction to unfolding issues on Mauna Kea and at Standing Rock.
2. Syllabus and expectations.

**Recitation:** Introductions, indianz.com, and social media coverage of Mauna Kea and Standing Rock.

**Monday, January 23.**

1. Religion and Worldviews. Trying out alternative perspectives in order to begin to understand Native American cultures and religions. Rock Cree and Yup'ik theories of animal-human relationships. The Sedna myth.

Reading: Franz Boas, "A Year Among the Eskimo."

**Wednesday, January 25.**

1. Who, when, where are Indians? Who are "we" to study "them"?

2. Images of "the Indian": Learning what not to see; perceiving what is hidden and assumed. Exploring the relationship of representations and reality, of past caricatures and present circumstances.

Reading: Robert Berkhofer, "The Idea of the Indian: Invention and Perpetuation."

**Thursday, January 26.** Special event and paper topic #1, due February 1. Charles Wilkinson, "Writing a Tribal History: My Long and Rewarding Journey with the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon." 5:00pm, Eaton Humanities 150.

**Recitation:** Discuss Wilkinson event, readings, the Sedna myth, and indianz.com.

**Saturday, January 28.** Special event and paper topic #2, due February 1. Severin Fowles, "Comanche Archaeology and the Theater of War." 7:00pm, Hale 270.

**Monday, January 30.**

1. Assign paper #3, due February 6: Analyzing the movie with reference to course readings.

2. Indian identities and stories. Watch *Smoke Signals*.

Reading: Joel Martin, "Indians, Contact and Colonialism in the Deep South."

**Wednesday, February 1.**

Paper #1 and #2 due.

1. Finish watching *Smoke Signals*.

2. Begin discussion of movie and related issues.

Watching: Find and watch *Atanarjuat: Fast Runner* (optional).

**Recitation:** Discuss *Smoke Signals* in relationship to the reading; discuss *Atanarjuat*.

**Monday, February 6.**

Paper #3 due.

1. The Sacred Pipe: posing questions, seeing complexity.

Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*, preface – ch. 4.

2. Assign paper topic #4, due February 13: Black Elk and the category of religion.

**Wednesday, February 8.**

1. Religion and repatriation. The *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* and religious language.

Reading: Johnson, *Sacred Claims*, 1-26 and 46-89.

**Recitation:** Discuss *Black Elk Speaks* and paper ideas.

**Monday, February 13.**

Paper #4 due and discuss.

1. Cheyenne history and religious practices: the suppleness of tradition. Religion and suffering.

Film clip: *The West* episode 4, "Who is the Savage" (15 minutes).

Reading: "Sweet Medicine's Prophecy."

2. Contemporary Sand Creek: site dedication and repatriation struggles. Reading: Johnson, *Sacred Claims*, 121-127.

**Wednesday, February 15.**

1. Update on Mauna Kea and Standing Rock, reading TBA.

**Recitation.** Review readings, general discussion, indianz.com.

**Monday, February 20.**

1. Assign tribal website exercise.
  2. Ute culture and religion. Places, people, and practices.
- Reading: Anne Smith (ed.), *Ute Tales*.

**Tuesday, February 21.**

Special event and paper topic #5, due February 27. Charlotte Rodrigue, Burns Paiute Tribe, "Modern Indian Identity." 6:30pm, Benson Earth Sciences 180.

**Wednesday, February 22.**

1. Ute oral traditions and ritual life.
  2. Film clip of Ute Tribal Park.
  3. Uses and abuses of Ancestral Puebloan ("Anasazi") sites and objects—slideshow.
- Reading: Johnson, *Sacred Claims*, 112-121.

**Recitation:** Discuss tribal website exercise and Rodrigue's event.

**Monday, February 27.**

Paper #5 due. Assign paper topic #6, due March 6: Navajo sandpainting.

1. Navajo cosmos and healing.
  2. Navajo history, culture, and religion.
- Reading: Gladys A. Reichard, "Theory of Curing."

**Wednesday, March 1.**

1. Navajo curing practices. Sandpainting, singing, and the community.
- Reading: Bruce Lincoln, "Kinaalda: Becoming the Goddess" and "Afterword: Rethinking Rituals of Women's Initiation."

**Recitation:** Indianz.com; Navajo sandpainting paper ideas.

**Monday, March 6.**

Paper topic #6 due.

1. Northwest Coast cultures and mythology: general overview.
  2. Give exam questions.
- Reading: Ruth Benedict, "The Northwest Coast of America."

**Wednesday, March 8.**

1. Northwest Coast continued. Kwakwaka'wakw ritual practice: the potlatch.
  2. Makah religion: Singing, whaling, and contemporary potlatches.
- Reading: Review Benedict. Goodman and Swan, from *Singing the Songs of My Ancestors*.

**Recitation:** Exam review.

**Monday, March 13.**

**Mid-term exam. Bring bluebooks.**

**Wednesday, March 15.**

1. Hawai'i I. The islands, concepts, history, vocabulary.
2. Along with indianz.com, for the next two weeks check Hawaiian newspapers online for information regarding Native Hawaiian issues (e.g., staradvertiser.com and www.oha.org/kwo).  
Reading: Lilikalā Kame'eiehiwa, "Traditional Hawaiian Metaphors."

**Recitation:** Discuss Hawaiian web stories, reading, and vocabulary.

**Friday, March 17.** Special event and topic #7, due March 22. "Traditional Indigenous Storytelling and Law." TBA.

**Monday, March 20.**

1. Hawai'i II. Sweet potatoes and gods: Why Hawaiian religion was bad for Captain Cook.

**Wednesday, March 22.**

Paper #7 due.

1. Hawai'i III. Repatriation and burial protection case studies: Maluaka, Honokahua, Mo'olua.  
Reading: *Sacred Claims*, 27-45.

**Recitation: No class.** Denver March Powwow, March 24-27. Paper topic #8, due April 5.

**Monday, April 3.**

1. Hawai'i IV. The kī'i la'au, Kawaihae, and Kawaiaha'o disputes: struggles over Hawaiian tradition in the present.  
Reading: *Sacred Claims*, 90-111; 128-160.
2. Assign paper topic #9, due April 10: Hawaiian repatriation or Mauna Kea.

**Wednesday, April 5.**

Paper #8 due.

1. Hawai'i V. Mauna Kea and Haleakalā; update on Standing Rock and related prayer protests.  
Reading: TBA; social media.

**Recitation:** Discuss powwow, readings, and Hawaiian paper topics.

**Monday, April 10.**

Paper #9 due.

1. Hawai'i VI. Current struggles over Native Hawaiian Federal Recognition: drama, politics, and religious images.  
Reading: TBA and social media.
2. Hawai'i VII. Examples of contemporary cultural and religious life: Hokule'a, offerings to Pele, and the Polynesian Cultural Center.  
Reading: Sally Promey on Volcanoes National Park and Pele:  
<http://freq.uenci.es/2011/10/18/hawaii-volcanoes-national-park-hvnp/>

**Wednesday, April 11.**

1. Ghost dancing, cultures in conflict, traditions in contact.
2. Film clip: *The West, VI. 8. (Ghost Dance)*.  
Reading: *Black Elk Speaks*, chapters 20-25.

**Recitation:** Discuss Ghost Dance religion and readings; indianz.com.

**Monday, April 17.**

1. Peyote religion. Legal and cultural issues. Religious appropriation and the development of a "Pan-Indian" movement.
2. Begin *Peyote Road*.

Reading: Smith and Snake, *One Nation Under God*.

**Wednesday, April 19.**

1. Finish *Peyote Road*.

**Recitation:** Discuss movies, readings, and indianz.com.

**Monday, April 24.**

1. Sacred spaces and the environment. Film, *In the Light of Reverence*.  
Reading: Vine Deloria, Jr., "Sacred Places and Moral Responsibility."
2. Assign paper #10, due May 1.

**Wednesday, April 26.**

1. Native American religious expression in literature. *House Made of Dawn*, part I.  
Reading: Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* and Paula Gunn Allen, "Bringing Home the Fact."

**Recitation:** Discuss papers ideas, novel and indianz.com.

**Monday, May 1.**

Paper #10 due.

1. Living, acting, and writing between worlds: *House Made of Dawn*, part II.  
Reading: Reread *House Made of Dawn*.
2. Give final exam questions; begin exam review.

**Wednesday, May 3.**

1. Exam review.

**Recitation:** Exam review.

**Exam:** TBA--bring blue books.

A few sample Mauna Kea-related sites:

- <https://www.facebook.com/pages/NAAU-News-Now/691118311020889?fref=ts>
- <https://www.facebook.com/protectmaunakea>
- <https://maunaawakea.com>
- <http://www.civilbeat.com/connect/mauna-kea/>

A few sample Standing Rock-related sites:

- <http://standingrock.org>
- <http://sacredstonecamp.org>
- <http://www.ocetisakowincamp.org>
- <https://www.facebook.com/RedWarriorCamp/>