

Department: HIST

Course No.: 3570 [237]

Credits: 3

Title: American Indian History

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Content Area: CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

Diversity: CA4 Non-International

Catalog Copy: HIST 237. American Indian History. Either semester. Three credits. Recommended preparation: HIST 231 Shoemaker

Surveys American Indian history in what is now the United States from precolumbian times up to the present. Cultural diversity among Indian peoples, the effects of European contact, tribal sovereignty, and other current issues.

Course Information:

1) This course surveys American Indian history in what is now the United States from precolumbian times up to the present. The course aims to be Indian-centered, and so while non-Indian stereotypes of Indians and how Europeans, and later Euroamericans, treated Indians (as in U.S. policy towards Indians, for example) are covered in the course, the main purpose of the course is to prioritize Indian perspectives on their own history and to emphasize to students how Indians have a variety of perspectives, rooted in cultural differences, historical developments, and individual differences of opinion. Because most students in the class have never met anyone who is Indian (or do not realize that they know people who are Indian) and because I have yet to have any Indian students in the class (that I was aware of), the course here at UConn does devote considerable time to deflating popular stereotypes and acquainting

students with the basics of U.S. Indian law and the unique position of tribal sovereignty in relation to the United States government.

2) Course requirements consist of a midterm and final exam requiring short written answers or essays, a group research project that has a bibliography and group presentation as the graded components, and a series of 3-5 short (2-3 pages) written assignments in response to the readings. Readings consist of a textbook (Colin Calloway's *First Peoples*, for example) and 3-4 other books, either collections of documents, autobiographies, or novels, all by Indian authors usually (except for the textbook).

3) The course is organized chronologically and begins with native origin stories explored through written versions along with paintings and other visual representations. The stories are contextualized by issues of storytelling practices and the possibilities of changes over time appearing in the existing written versions of them. The Bering Land Bridge theory is included as an "origin story" told by scientists. A week of precolumbian history follows, relying primarily on archaeological findings and highlighting some of the more dramatic past cultures--the Moundbuilders, the Anasazi, with some overview of cultures that were less dramatic/less visible in the archaeological record. The main point of these first few weeks is to establish the cultural diversity of native North Americans. The next several weeks are spent on the first few centuries of European contact covering such issues as Indian impressions of Europeans and European impressions of Indians; the economic benefits from the exchange of trade goods and the devastating impact of the ecological exchanges between "New" and "Old" worlds; and the periodic ups and downs of diplomacy and warfare characterizing European and Indian relations in the first few centuries, with particular emphasis on the processes by which Indians lost land to European settlement and the emergence of a separatist ideology that encouraged the creation of a reservation system. The rest of the course is by necessity organized along a narrative in which U.S. Indian policy appears as the major instigator of changes in Indian communities--from Indian removal policies in the 1830s to the rapid U.S. expansion onto the Plains during the Civil War and after (resulting in such well-known events as the Battle of Little Bighorn and the Wounded Knee Massacre), to the assimilationist policies of the late-nineteenth century (land allotment, boarding schools, etc.) to the 1930s reversal of policy symbolized by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, to the urban Relocation and reservation Termination policies of the 1950s, to the reversal in policy and espousal of tribal self-determination in the 1970s and up through to the present. Although U.S. policy provides a narrative structure (by "necessity" because it did have an enormous impact on Indian tribes and Indian individuals), throughout the discussion of these developments, Indian perspectives on these policies are at center-stage, particularly their own disagreements and determinations as to what course to take in response to changes in U.S. Indian policy and their creative adjustment and assertion of rights whenever any single policy was newly implemented.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed.: Students work on becoming articulate in short writing sentences and, particularly, in an oral presentation where they are graded both on a prepared presentation and their ability to answer spontaneous questions. They acquire intellectual breadth and versatility by being exposed to a variety of theories about the nature of human diversity (early European explanations for the

existence of Indians, Indian explanations for European origins and suppositions as to what explained their differences and similarities to Europeans and Africans, the invention of race and racism, assimilationist theories as seen in U.S. Indian policies, and cultural relativism). They also read in variety of materials--from oral traditions that exist in written form, to other cultural expressions such as novels by Indian authors, to government documents (treaties, laws, tribal constitutions), to scholarship. Because this topic has long been the province of anthropology, the course is interdisciplinary in that the approach is very much historical in its method, structure, and goals, but many of the ideas, readings, and knowledge come from anthropology and archaeology. Students acquire critical judgement, most notably in classroom discussion of documents and in learning a basic skill crucial to the study of American Indian history, which is how to discern Indian points of view from documents written by non-Indians. They also write three short papers that are critical essays on the readings, in which they are to consider such issues as perspective, rhetoric, and political agenda in the creation of that reading. They acquire moral sensitivity primarily by being exposed to other points of view than their own and to the existence of multiple points of view on every issue. Historical experiences that raise moral issues--territorial expansion, forced removal, forced assimilation, what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate acts of war--come up in class discussions of course material. Students acquire awareness of their era and society by learning how certain institutions and practices they hear about in the news today (Indians running casinos, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, Indian reservations) arose sometime in the past from particular contexts. They learn what the meaning of many terms are (what exactly an "Indian tribe" is, for instance), and they learn a lot about the U.S. government, which for most of its history conceptualized the Indian presence in North America as "the Indian problem," and which instituted special regulations relating to Indians that resemble colonial practices elsewhere around the world but in other ways are also unique to the United States. How Indians carved out space for themselves in American society is an interesting story, and one that the average American is unfamiliar with but hears about frequently and vaguely in the news all the time. For how the course deals with diversity, see the response to the diversity questions.

#### CA4 Criteria:

1) The course deals substantially with "varieties of human experiences, perceptions, thoughts, values, and/or modes of creativity." Lectures and readings repeatedly comment on the different historical experiences of various Indian peoples and introduce students to the "cultural areas" concept invented by anthropologists and still in use as a way to divide North American native peoples by their environmental influences and regional cultural sympathies ("woodlands," "southeast," "northwest coast," "plains," etc.). However, at the same time lectures distinguish cultural differences within regions. Because students tend to think of "the Indian" as a coherent being, the course's main mission is to acquaint students with the diversity of peoples included under that rubric, without simultaneously overwhelming them with the ethnic labels. So, course material tends to focus on some of the largest and most influential tribal nations--Navajo, the Iroquois Confederacy, Cherokee, and various Lakota (Sioux) peoples--as a way to give students some continuity with certain peoples' histories while at the same time showing definitively the cultural and historical differences among Indians. For the twentieth-century material, course lectures and readings recount the rise of pan-Indian movements, showing that Indians from different nations could identify commonalities in their experiences and form organizations as "Indians."

However, at the same time, course readings and lectures comment frequently on differences of opinion: particularly in how the Cherokee Nation split over the removal issue and how at the same time the Cherokee Nation was becoming more ethnically diverse through intermarriage with whites and the institutionalization of black slavery modeled on the American South; how some Indian individuals advocated land allotment while others opposed it (Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks* is perfect for showing how this happened on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa reservation); how some Indian students believed they benefited from boarding schools while others considered it imperialist oppression intending Indian extinction (students read documents from boarding school students' autobiographies or compare tracts produced by the turn-of-the-century Indian educator Henry Roe Cloud and Henry Pratt, founder of the U.S. boarding-school system); and how the Indian political activism of the post-World War II period ran the gamut from moderate reform organizations to violent radical movements similar to 1960s-1970s radical student activism and the Black Panthers (reading Vine Deloria, Jr., on the National Congress of the American Indians alongside Wilma Mankiller's memoir of the Alcatraz takeover or Mary Crow Dog's memoir of the Wounded Knee takeover, for example).

In addition, the presentations at the end of the course, by research groups of 4-6 students, add important content. Some semesters, these presentations are on tribal histories (emphasizing the distinctiveness of different native people's experiences); other semesters, the research project focuses on the history of current issues (the tribal federal acknowledgment process, Indian identity and tribal membership, casinos, mascots, etc.); if current issues are the focal point for the presentations, students are explicitly charged with conveying the multiple points of view taken by people on that current issue.

Criteria #3 is also important to the course in a complex way. Because many students enter the course with certain images of "the Indian" in their minds ("the Indian" is environmentally sensitive, does not believe in private property, wears feathers and beadwork, chases buffalos on horses, scalps, drinks a lot and lives on welfare, BUT strangely is also rich because of casinos--in which case they aren't really Indian, are they?, etc.). So, because the stereotypes are so powerful in American popular culture and because so few non-Indian Americans actually know anyone who is Indian, my main objective is to emphasize the diversity within the Indian population--to break up and complicate any residual stereotypes and present Indians as individuals, not as types. Secondly, however, I emphasize how Indians are similar to everybody else around the world, especially to Europeans, since another frequent misconception of Indian history is that Europeans were superior to Indians in intelligence, civility, and social institutions. In other words, to counter the cardboard Indian stereotype on the one hand and the misconception that Indians and Europeans were completely opposite in their cultural practices on the other hand, lectures often comment on the diversity among Indians while noting similarities between Indians and Europeans. These similarities and differences are addressed most in lectures and readings on the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when we discuss land tenure, diplomatic rituals and crosscultural communication, gender roles, and political organization since in all these areas there can be seen several distinct similarities between Indians and Europeans and several differences among Indians (women's role in Iroquoisan governments was unique compared to other Indian government structures; and yet, female sachems, like Queen

Elizabeth I, were exceptions, not the rule, and in that sense gender roles were similar among 17th-century New England Algonquians and the English).

Also, a third way in which commonalities and differences co-exist in the course is, as mentioned earlier, in the 500-1000 year narrative, during which several hundred distinct peoples were named "Indian" by Columbus and gradually come to accept the label and make it their own, seeing in "Indian" not a primordial single identity or a common culture but rather a shared historical experience as colonized peoples whose lands were occupied by outsiders. This rising pan-Indianism is first explored in the course as showing up in religious movements (the Shawnee Prophet, the Ghost Dance) and further explored in the twentieth century in the writings of what historian Fred Hoxie calls the Indian literati, that is Charles Eastman, Carlos Montezuma, and other Indian writers and activists who became prominent in the first formal, national pan-Indian organization, the Society of American Indians.

Finally, criteria #4, issues of human rights and migration are central to the course; indeed, the challenge in teaching American Indian history is to try to find uplifting moments in a semester that unavoidably has to cover a host of horrific tragedies from the smallpox epidemics that started with European contact to the Cherokee Trail of Tears to the Wounded Knee Massacre. Events in American Indian history naturally raise moral questions--mainly about territorial expansion and forced cultural assimilation--which we engage in classroom discussion but without arriving at any easy resolution. Usually, I try to package the moral questions in past and ongoing debates so that students can imagine the role of point of view and political ideology in the moral positions taken by historical figures in the past. Issues of human rights raised explicitly in course lectures and readings are how Europeans acquired Indian land and justified their rights to it, how Indians embraced certain aspects of U.S. law (treaties, most notably) to protect national sovereignty, how Indians tried a variety of defenses (accommodation, the U.S. Supreme Court, warfare) when pressured to remove from historic homelands to somewhere else. Significantly, American Indian history can give to students a more nuanced understanding of human rights because of the particular positions many Indian individuals and tribes have taken to defend their autonomous status as nations and the consequent ambiguity expressed in many Indian communities toward individualized, civil rights and the meaning, or value, of U.S. citizenship. This is dealt with explicitly in the course by examining the language of the U.S. constitution, the U.S. Trade and Intercourse Acts, the provisions of the Dawes and Curtis Acts of the late-nineteenth century, the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 (which made all Indians citizens of the United States), and by reading various Indian authors across time, from William Apess' early-nineteenth polemics against racism and his efforts to free the Mashpee Tribe from Massachusetts' corrupt guardianship system to Vine Deloria, Jr.'s, 1960's manifesto *Custer Died for Your Sins*.