

American Indian Literature  
Native Fictions that Reconstruct American History  
Fall 2009

English 3344-001                      Office Hrs., 3:30-5 T/TH; W by appt., 405 or 203 Carlisle  
Dr. Roemer                                      All appointments must be scheduled.  
T/TH: 2-3:20; Preston 102                      817-272-2729; roemer@uta.edu  
IF YOU MISSED THE 1ST CLASS, SEE ME IMMEDIATELY AFTER THIS CLASS.

Nature of the Course

(S)he who writes history controls the past. Indians are often associated with the past. Hence writers of Indian histories control Indians. There is truth in this syllogism, truth that has inspired 20th- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century Native American novelists to write historical novels that offer alternatives to popular representations of particular eras in American history. In this course we will discuss seven of these novels. The criteria for selection were the following: each is written by an American Indian writer; each focuses on a specific era (or periods) at least two decades before the novel's publication; each features events, people, places, issues, and interpretations that challenge popular concepts of the historical period(s); and, as a group, they reflect a diversity of approaches to writing historical fiction. Rather than using the conventional chronology of publication dates to structure the course, we use a chronological progression based on the time settings of the novels. We begin Ella Deloria's depiction of Lakota lifeways (almost) free of white contact and progress through mid-19th-, and early, mid-, and late 20th-century representations by James Welch, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Linda Hogan. We conclude with two more comprehensive historical fictions that focus on multiple eras. *Plague of Doves* reaches back to 1896 and 1911, and *Miko Kings* reconstructs 1907. Both novels highlight selected subsequent eras and bring their narratives up to the "present." This selection of novels barely scratches the surface of the genre; for example, there are Native authors read by specific tribes for their depictions of their history (e.g. Robert J. Conely's extensive series of Cherokee historical fiction).

Goals, [Means, Assessment]

1. To introduce students to seven important American Indian authors, including several internationally known writers (Momaday, Silko, Welch, and Erdrich), one nationally known writer (Hogan), and two known mainly to specialists in Indian literature (Deloria, Howe) [readings, lectures, discussion groups, exams]
2. To examine aesthetic, cultural, and ideological implications of the similarities and differences between these fictional historical representation and popular non-fictional representations of 18<sup>th</sup>-, 19<sup>th</sup>-, 20<sup>th</sup>-, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century America; we will pay particular attention to the types of people, places, events, and issues presented as historically significant [readings, lectures, group discussions, exams, second paper]

3. To discuss the aesthetic, cultural, and ideological implications of different forms of historical fiction [readings, lectures, group discussions, exams]
4. To improve writing skills that enable students to determine the preconceptions they bring to the experience of history reading [1<sup>st</sup> paper] and to determine the significance of differing historical interpretations [exams, 2<sup>nd</sup> paper].

#### Required Readings

Deloria, <i>Waterlily</i> (1944, 1947, 1988)	Hogan, <i>Solar Storms</i> (1995)
Welch, <i>Fools Crow</i> (1986)	Erdrich, <i>Plague of Doves</i> (2008)
Momaday, <i>House Made of Dawn</i> (1968)	Howe, <i>Miko Kings</i> (2007)
Silko, <i>Ceremony</i> (1977)	Selected period history (see 2 <sup>nd</sup> paper)

#### Tentative Schedule of Topics, Readings, Exams, Papers

Introduction to the Course & American Indian History 8/25,27  
 Reading: Handouts distributed during the first class

#### **Short Answer (S/A) Exam on American Indian History 9/1**

19th-Century: From Pre- Contact to Foreboding Encounters on the Plains

Early 1800s: Dakota History Harnessed for Ethnography	9/1,3,8
Reading: <i>Waterlily</i>	
1867-1870: Erasing Borders Between Personal, Public, and Visionary Blackfeet Histories	9/10,15,17
Reading: <i>Fools Crow</i>	

#### **First S/A and Essay Examination 9/22**

Mid-20th Century: Rural / Urban, Local / Transnational, Secular / Mythic Histories

1945-1952: Modernist Kiowa and Jemez Accountings of Pueblo, Los Angeles, and European (War) Events	9/24, 29; 10/1,[6]
Reading: <i>House Made of Dawn</i>	

1940s-mid-1950s: A History of Sickness to Health, from Mixed-blood Isolation and the Bataan March to the Land, the Laguna Kiva, and Time Immemorial	10/6,8,13,15
Reading: <i>Ceremony</i>	

#### **First Paper Due 10/20**

1972-73 / 75: Mixing a First-Person Womanlines International  
*Bildungsroman*, Journey, & Advocacy Narrative 10/20,22,27;11/3  
 Reading: *Solar Storms* [no class 10/29]

**Second S/A and Essay Exam 11/5**

A Hundred Years of Hanging, Baseball, Hate and Love –  
 Ojibwe and Choctaw Chronicles

1896 – Present: The Lives/Loves and Deaths of a  
 North Dakota Town 11/10,12,17,[19]  
 Reading: *Plague of Doves*

1907 – Present: The Great American (Indian) Pass(age)  
 Time in Oklahoma 11[19],24;12/1,3  
 Films: *His Last Game* and *Playing Pasttime*  
 Reading: *Miko Kings*

**Second Paper Due 12/1**  
**Review For Final (Third S/A Essay Exam) 12/3**  
**Final Exam 12/8: 2-4:30 PM**

### Examinations

Except for the first short-answer exam, which will be based on a list of dates, events, terms, and concepts distributed the first day of class, each exam will consist of two parts: (1) brief identifications and short answer questions taken from the readings, lectures, and group discussions (closed book); (2) essay questions related to class discussions but representing applications not discussed in detail in class (open book). During the class before the exam, I will distribute a detailed study sheet that covers both parts of the exam.

Grading criteria for the essay questions include demonstrating the ability to focus on the question asked and to support claims with specific and relevant examples from the texts.

### Papers

The first paper (approximately 1250 words/ five pages; due October 20) requires you to define important associations that you bring to a reading of historical fiction and to determine the effects of that association. Select one of the novels assigned. Examine three significant transformational associations. (The associations/influences might be books you have read, courses you have taken, people you have known, beliefs you advocate, or personal experiences. They might be related to American Indians or particular historical periods, or they might have little to do with either.) For each influence examined, (1) define the nature of the influence, (2) indicate which part or parts of the novel were shaped by the association, and (3), most importantly, analyze the

impact of the association on the relevant section(s). This process should help you to understand how your associations transform what you read. They should also help you to understand how associations that a writer brings to an historical period can shape how s(he) "reads" that period. A good way to begin this paper is to take notes as you read a book you might want to use for the paper. When you have a particularly strong negative or positive response, note why you think you responded that way. As you proceed, see if there are any patterns to your explanations. These patterns should direct you to the associations you will define and analyze. Grading criteria: how well you articulate the above stated requirements (1,2,3, especially 3) and evidence of writing competence (the ability to invent and construct engaging, coherent sentences, and paragraphs, and a unified paper; demonstrated skills in grammar, spelling, and punctuation).

The second paper (1250 words / five pages; due December 1) requires you to determine how a particular novel challenges typical representations of a period. Select a different novel from the one discussed in the first paper. Examine closely themes, issues, episodes, characters, settings and/or descriptions that offer alternatives to typical history textbook interpretations of the relevant years. To make the comparisons, consult relevant period histories (e.g., for the 1920s Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday*; for the 1950s, David Halberstam's *The Fifties*), or topical histories (e.g., baseball histories for *Miko Kings*), or relevant sections of general American histories, or Internet sources that offer overviews of the relevant period. Be sure to identify which historical source you use. Grading criteria: demonstrated writing competence (see above) and the ability to support your claims about alternate historical views with convincing, specific comparisons between the novel and the history text(s) or Internet sources.

#### Approximate Grading Weights

Short-Answer Exam (5%); 1<sup>st</sup> S/A & Essay Exam (15%); 2nd S/A and Essay Exam (25%); 3<sup>rd</sup> S/A and Essay Exam (20%); 1st paper (15%); 2nd paper (20%).

#### Gentle Warnings

If you must withdraw from the course, follow University procedures; otherwise the computer will give you an F. For each five *unexcused* absences, the semester grade drops by a half letter grade. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Violators (I prefer criminal vocabulary for this offense) will be turned over to the Student Affairs Office for disciplinary action. If you are confused about plagiarism, consult with me or read chapter 2 of the MLA Handbook.

#### Encouragement

Improvement and consistent class participation can alter semester grades (in a positive way). Also I am very willing to accommodate students with disabilities. Early in the semester, these students should present their authorized documents from the appropriate University office. Note: The Office of Student Success Programs (817-272-6107) offers advising and mentoring for academic, personal, and social problems.