ENGLISH 580I and 860A:
Literature and Culture of the American Indian

Spring 2007
Line #: 580I: 24127; 860A: 24291
Tuesday 4:30-6:50
Lindquist Hall 325
Email: diane.quantic@wichita.edu

Dr. Diane Quantic
Office: LH 623
Phone: 978-6764
Office hours: TTh 9:00-12:00
Th: 2:00-4:00

Course Description:
The course title indicates the purpose of this class: to study the role of the
American Indian in American literature and culture. Such a course could look like a litter
of kittens, straying off in all directions. We could apply postmodern theory to the
literature. We could study the myths and beliefs of the many tribes that are a part of the
generic “American Indian.” We could focus on the political and economic policies that
have resulted in second class status for the people Canadians call “First Nations.” We
could focus on Indian’s world view. Any of these approaches is likely to leave us
frustrated and/or confused. Instead, taking our lead from Sherman Alexie, we will focus
on narrative: telling stories. After all, American Indians have been telling stories for
hundreds of years: it is only in the 20th century that they began putting them into words
on paper. And they are still telling stories. As Alexie says, “It’s turtles all the way
down.”

Indian narratives take many forms and appear in unexpected places in American
culture. This is what we will be focusing on: is there one Indian story or many? how has
it/have they influenced American culture and literature? Specifically, we will be looking
at a range of stories, beginning with the earliest forms of the Indians’ oral narratives and
accounts of encounters written by Euro-Americans and Indians to explore how these
stories reflect radically different views of the world. Early on we will examine both the
Romantic myth of the Indian and the ways in which Indian/Euro-American
confrontations have become a part of American culture. We will look at the ways the
Indians’ stories have become a part of mainstream American literature, music, film and
technology.

Course Procedures:
This will be a discussion course. Participants are expected to keep up with the
reading and contribute their ideas to the conversation. Blackboard will be used for
communication and record keeping.
Grades will be based upon participation and on written and oral reports as follows:
580: Three short papers on topics to be determined by the student in consultation with the
instructor.
860: A series of papers that explore an issue, topic or particular individual: 1) a brief
description of project and annotated bibliography; 2) a formal proposal of app. 5 pages;
3) a formal documented paper 12-15 pages.
All of these papers will be due at the same time (see course schedule).

Attendance is required. If you aren’t here, you will obviously be missed. Please
let the instructor know if you will be absent. More than five absences for any reason will
result in a failing grade for the course.
Course Schedule

**Week One:** Jan. 16: Telling Stories: Native Narrative Strategies  
Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories*

**Week Two:** Jan. 23: Some More Theories about Telling More Stories  
Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories*, continued  

**Week Three:** Jan. 30: Yet More Stories  
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*

**Week Four:** Feb. 6: First Stories, White Stories, Indian Stories  
Rowlandson, *Captivity*  
Hawthorne, “Young Goodman Brown” and “Roger Malvin’s Burial”  
Luther Standing Bear, chps XIII-XVI, pp. 123-170  
Zitkala-Sa, *Dreams and Thunder: Stories*  

**Week Five:** Feb. 13: Indians in American Culture  
Luther Standing Bear, *My People, The Sioux*, “Introduction” and chps I through XII (pp.3-122)  
Zitkala-Sa, *Dreams and Thunder: The Sun Dance Opera*  

**580:** First paper; **860:** Annotated bibliography due

**Week Six:** Feb. 20: Clashes of cultures stories: one  
James Welch, *Fool’s Crow*  
James Welch, *Killing Custer*, chps. 1 and 2, pp.25-73

**Week Seven:** Feb. 27 Indians in American culture: film  
Luther Standing Bear, *My People, the Sioux*, chps XVII, p. 171 to end  

**Week Eight:** March 6 Research time (instructor out of town)
Week Nine: March 13 Visual Stories: film
Discussion of films: Circle of Death, Stagecoach, Smoke Signals
Video: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West (2)
Films will be on reserve

860: Research proposal due

March 20:

Spring Break

Week Ten: March 27: Clashes of culture: two
Linda Hogan, Mean Spirit

Week Eleven: April 3 Clashes of culture: three
N. Scott Momaday, House Made of Dawn

580: Second paper; 860: Research proposal due

Week Twelve: April 10: Contemporary stories
Reprise Thomas King, The Truth About Stories
Sherman Alexie, The Toughest Indian in the World
Reprise: Smoke Signals
Reserved reading: Vizenor, Manifest Manners, chp 1 “Postindian Warriors” pp. 1-44.

Week Thirteen: April 17: Extended stories
Louise Erdrich Tracks

Week Fourteen: April 24: Really extended stories or These People Look Familiar
Louise Erdrich, The Painted Drum

Week Fifteen: May 1: Narrative: One Last Round
Thomas King, Green Grass, Running Water


Stories we will read: “Young Goodman Brown” and “Roger Malvin’s Burial”


Mary Rowlandson *The Account of Mary Rowlandson and Other Captivity Narratives*. Mineola, NY: Dover, nd


Bibliography

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* Indicates a book on reserve for assigned readings.

Poorly written and documented hardly at all, this is a sprawling history of everything that might or might not have happened in the vicinity of either Buffalo Bill or Sitting Bull or a lot of other people. The author is a performer who has “spent nearly forty years researching, composing, producing and performing A Ballad of the West, a trilogy of one-man shows that . . . form an epic history of the American West,” and he is determined to get every fact he ever encountered into this volume. What sources he does cite are not dependable or verified, including puffery biographies by B. Bill Cody and Gen. Custer as well as those of Mrs. Custer, who spent her life keeping her husband’s real character from showing through her carefully crafted version of his reputation. Now and then there is some information about Cody’s relations with the Indians he shot and/or hired for his Wild West Show. Sitting Bull is actually a minor character in Bridger’s tome. I have no idea how he got into the title.

Despite the rather objectionable title, this is a useful reference that includes discussion of the rise of the Western as a unique American genre, the “liberal” western, people who passed as Indians on the screen and in print and the European Western phenomenon with particular focus on Karl May. Excellent sources and good bibliography.

Much of the background for my approach and organization for this class comes from Deloria’s two volumes. This volume discusses the role of Indians in American culture in these areas: violence; film; athletics; technology; music and modernity. WSU: E98 S67 D46 2004

Beginning with pre-Revolutionary War (and earlier), Deloria traces ways in which Euro-Americans have “played” Indian—in organizations (remember the Boston Tea Party?) such as fraternal groups and Boy Scouts and how Indians have been viewed in American culture—in literature, ethnography, etc. WSU: E98 P99 D45 1998

This is primarily a history but it is by an important Indian leader of the early twentieth century and is a good overview of tribal organization. McNickle also wrote short stories, collected in The Hawk is Hungry and novels, The Surrounded (1936), Wind from an Enemy Sky (1978: posthumous) and Runner in the Star (1954). The D’Arcy McNickle collection at the Newberry Library in Chicago is an important site for research in American Indian literature and culture. WSU: E91 M26 1976

Owens, of Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish descent, is one of the most important contemporary American Indian critics. After a general introduction, Owens discusses writers from the very early John Rollin Ridge and Mourning Dove through Momaday, Welch, Silko and Erdrich. WSU: PS153 I52 O74 1992

In this study, Owens focuses on topics rather than works under the headings, "Mixedbloods and Mixed Messages" (literature), "Filming the Territory," "Autobiographical Reflections," and "Words, Wilderness and Native America."

Owens is also the author of a number of novels, mysteries, including Nightsong, Dark River, The Sharpest Sight and Bone Game. Like many successful American Indians, Owens evidently suffered from deep doubts and conflicts. He committed suicide in 2002. Bio at http://www.dateline.ucdavis.edu/081602/dl_owens.html  
WSU: E98 M63 O9 1998


A study of the influence on and of Indian literature on American literary narrative. A fairly traditional, "thick" approach.  
WSU: PS374 I49 R35 1999


A good history of this truly American phenomenon. Reddin focuses on George Catlin, Buffalo Bill Cody, Miller's 101 Ranch and the film career of Tom Mix. The author does a good job of putting Buffalo Bill into his rightful historical context. The Indians that were an important part of his shows are discussed in some detail. Well documented with a good bibliography. If you want to study the beginnings of the America's love of extravaganzas and/or the nation's romantic view of the American West, Reddin's work is a good place to start.


A part of the popular and valuable MLA series on teaching world literary classics, this volume follows the series' format, with sections on materials and various teaching strategies such as history and culture, Erdrich's fictional world (necessary for the often confused Erdrich reader), pedagogical issues and critical perspectives. Also included is a comprehensive bibliography. Since Erdrich continues to add novels to her string of interrelated stories, it is important to pay attention to dates of publications about her work.

Standing Bear, Luther. Land of the Spotted Eagle. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1933.

This is Standing Bear's first work. It is more general than My People, the Sioux, his autobiography. Standing Bear intended this volume to be an instructive account of Sioux life for Euro-American's curious about Indian life. He achieves his purpose: Standing Bear and Zitkala-Sa have left valuable eyewitness accounts of the rapid transformation of the plains Indians (primarily the Sioux) from "natives" into educated but not entirely assimilated "Americans." (Quote indicate some irony in this last sentence).  
WSU E99 T34 S7 1978

---. Stories of the Sioux. Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1934.

As the title indicates, this is a volume of oral legends and stories told in print by someone who heard them as a boy in the tribe's camps, around the evening campfires. A good collection.  
WSU: E99 T34 S93 1998


As the title indicates, this volume focuses on articles about Erdrich's first collection. Although only four years older than Saris's volume, it relies more on non-Native commentators and some essays already out of date. A good second reference after Saris's more recent, more comprehensive collection.

Vizenor, an Anishinaabe on the faculty of the Univ. of California at Berkely, is, with Louis Owens, a premier Indian postmodern critic and author. Like other recent scholars, he broadens our view of American Indian literature, including correcting some of the "wannabe" and other non-Indian approaches. Vizenor is also the author of a number of novels and other works. Wikipedia biography: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerald_Vizenor


Vizenor uses the term "the new fur trade" to identify modern exchanges between white and Native Americans--money, language, skills, etc. This is not the usual formal critical study but rather a "creative" approach that includes the reincarnation of Gen. Custer as the head of Native American programs. Vizenor, like many Indian writers, has a subtle sense of humor. WSU: PS3572 19 W6


Welch wrote this comprehensive look at the defining conflict between Plains Indians and the American military while working on the American Experience production *Last Stand at Little Big Horn: Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse Battle Custer*. Not strictly an historical narrative, this work weaves Welch's own story, his curiosity about Custer and, most importantly, his research into the Indian's point of view into a fascinating narrative. The central chapter is a careful account of the battle itself that, as one of the Indians reportedly said, took about as long as it takes for a man to eat his dinner. In earlier chapters, Welch recounts the important confrontations between the Indians and whites that led up to the Bighorn battle and in the following chapters he reports on the fate of the Indians, including Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and the final massacre at Wounded Knee.

The first two chapters are particularly helpful as background for reading Welch's novel *Fool's Crow*. WSU: E83 876 W38 1994


Womack, a member of the Creek Nation, focuses on several Creek writers to observe the role of the Indian writer and critic in (and outside) of the American literary mainstream. Womack's primary audience is the American Indian writer. Nevertheless, his first two chapters are valuable commentaries on the American Indian art of creative narratives. WSU: PS153 152 W66 1999


First published in 1901, this collection has long been in print, and, like Luther Standing-Bear's, is one of the first collections of oral tales by one of the first Sioux to be educated at an American Indian school (in Indiana). Recently reprinted by Nebraska as *Iktomi and the Ducks and Other Sioux Stories*.


First published in 1921, this volume includes Zitkala-Sa's frequently-reprinted autobiographical account of her removal from her Sioux tribe and her education into mainstream American culture, which the girl resisted as much as she could. It also includes an account of her later career and a number of original stories that reflect the conflicts American Indians encountered as a result of their marginal status in American society.

I have multiple copies of Zitkala-Sa's books that you can borrow if you are curious.
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FILMOGRAPHY


*By His Own Request: Buffalo Bill and Lookout Mountain*. Buffalo Bill Museum and Grave, Parks and Recreation Department, City and County of Denver. No date. VHS.


*Last Stand at Little Big Horn: Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse Battle Custer*. American Experience. PBS. 1992. DVD

*On the Pow Wow Trail*. First on Board. No date. DVD NOTE: Not yet viewed or rated.

*Smoke Signals*. Produced and Directed by Chris Eyre. Shadowcatcher Entertainment. No date. DVD. VHS copy in WSU library. Cassette #: 15779