Native American Literature

English 382.001/American Culture 328

All Americans know something about Native Americans—at least they think they do. Stereotypes abound and, for most of our history, most of them have been vicious. But all stereotypes are damaging to the people they include, even the most benign and supposedly positive. Where vicious stereotypes would silence and discredit those they target, stereotypes of the supposedly benign kind are all too ready to speak for them, preempting their own efforts to speak the truth as they see it.

Native Americans have been publishing their own writing in English since 1772. In focusing almost exclusively on twentieth-century novels, this course will consider only a small part of the large, rich, and various body of the literature, both oral and written, produced by the indigenous peoples of our country. Each of our readings will, in its own way, powerfully contradict the usual ways of imagining and thinking about "Indians."

The course will begin with an extended look at a work which is neither fictive nor entirely Native-authored, John Neidhardt's Black Elk Speaks. This book will help us to identify certain crucial problems in the reading and interpretation of texts infused with Native American cultural values and emerging from Native American experience, from a perspective outside those values and that experience. Subsequent readings will include, in this order, the following novels: D'Arcy McNickle's The Surrounded, N. Scott Momaday's House Made of Dawn, James Welch's The Death of Jim Loney, Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony, Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine and also Erdrich's Tracks, James Welch's Fools Crow.

Fall 2012

Tues & Thurs

10-11:30am

This course satisfies the American Lit and New Traditions requirement for English Concentrators

Professor
Lincoln Faller

www.lsa.umich.edu/english

"When it comes to Native Americans, even Einstein could play the fool"