

University of New Mexico
American Studies 356/556
Topics in Native American Studies
Spring 2000
Wednesday 4:00-6:30
Mitchell Hall 207

Native American Essayists

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Most of us read more essays than we realize. Some of them we read for the pleasure that good literature provides. Some we read to satisfy curiosities aroused by an unusual title or by a phrase that happens to catch our attention as we idly turn the pages of a magazine. Some we read for information needed in our college or professional work. . . . When we read essays, we should want to read them with full understanding of their meaning and value. This understanding is not always easy to achieve; for the essay is a medium of expression which, when the subject and purpose require, can become almost as complex and subtle as a poem or a short story. . . .

One consequence of instruction and practice in careful reading is improvement in our own writing. . . . As we examine the details of the essays we read, and above all as we see how they function together to express a meaning that is far more than simply their sum, we have a better understanding of the nature of unity, coherence, and emphasis in a work and of the general ways in which these qualities can be realized in any composition. . . . As we become more certain of our standards of judgment and more skilled in applying them to what we read, we become more critical, in a creative way, of our own compositions and more careful and imaginative in revising them. . . .

It may seem a little bold for us to ask questions about essays written by individuals who often know more about their subjects and about essays as a genre than we do. . . . But as readers we have a right to evaluate what we read. The writers expect us to. As students we have a responsibility to evaluate it, for this is part of our learning to distinguish the good and the true. If we can support our judgments with reasons based upon careful study, if we are willing to submit them to the test of discussion and to modify them when we are mistaken, we need not hesitate. Out of the practice of making judgments, out of the experience of reading that has preceded them, will come new knowledge, much pleasure, and invaluable training for the many decisions in life that lie ahead.

John L. Stewart
The Essay (1952)

Course Description

This course explores the essay as postcolonial literary genre by considering the work of several contemporary Native American essayists. Course readings address a variety of issues and themes, including: oral and literary traditions; worldview, religion, and sacred lands; tribal history and prophecy; colonialism and federal policy; autobiography, family, and reservation life; education and activism; stereotypes and cultural survival. Selected documentary films by Native American filmmakers are also screened and discussed.

Course Readings

These texts are available for purchase at the UNM Bookstore and are also on two-hour closed reserve at the Reserve Desk in Zimmerman Library.

Required:

N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

Carter Revard, *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1998).

Janet Campbell Hale, *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* (New York, NY: Random House, 1993).

Vine Deloria, Jr., *For This Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

Recommended:

H. Ramsey Fowler and Jane E. Aaron, *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 7th ed. (New York, NY: Longman, 1998).

Course Requirements

Class participation	33%
Research project	33%
Final exam	33%
Sense of humor	1%

Course Schedule

January 19: Course Introductions

January 26: Course Introductions (continued)

February 2: N. Scott Momaday
reading: *The Man Made of Words* –107

February 9: N. Scott Momaday (continued)
reading: *The Man Made of Words* –211

February 16: Leslie Marmon Silko
reading: *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* –99

February 23: Leslie Marmon Silko (continued)
reading: *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* –200

March 1: Carter Revard
reading: *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* –91

March 8: Carter Revard (continued)
reading: *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* –183

~~March 15:~~ Spring Break

March 22: Janet Campbell Hale
reading: *Bloodlines* –87

March 29: Janet Campbell Hale (continued)
reading: *Bloodlines* –187

April 5: Vine Deloria, Jr.
reading: *For This Land* –99

April 12: Vine Deloria, Jr. (continued)
reading: *For This Land* –202

April 19: Vine Deloria, Jr. (continued)
reading: *For This Land* –296

April 26: Research Presentations

May 3: Research Presentations (continued)

May 10, 5:30-7:30 p.m.: Final Exam

Academic Integrity

The American Studies faculty has adopted a formal policy on academic integrity, which is based on the "Policy on Academic Dishonesty" adopted by the University President:

Each student is expected to maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. The University reserves the right to take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty or otherwise fails to meet the standards. Any student judged to have engaged in academic dishonesty in course work may receive a reduced or failing grade for the work in question and/or for the course.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, dishonesty in quizzes, tests, or assignments; claiming credit for work not done or done by others; hindering the academic work of other students; misrepresenting academic or professional qualifications within or without the University; and nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other University records.

I will be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about academic and professional ethics, either during class or in an office appointment.

Special Accommodations

Please notify me as soon as possible if you experience any personal circumstances that might affect your participation in this course: medical conditions, physical limitations, learning disabilities, academic problems, emotional crises, family difficulties, or religious obligations. I will be happy to make reasonable accommodations when appropriate, provided that you notify me in a timely fashion. All personal information will be kept in strict confidentiality. Several important campus offices that you may find helpful are listed below:

Learning Support Services
Zimmerman Library 339, 277-8291

Student Support Services
Mesa Vista Hall 2021, 277-3506

Counseling and Therapy Services
Student Health Center, 277-4537

Agora Crisis Center
Student Union Building 20, 277-3013