AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY
TOPIC: BLACK ELK SPEAKS
HIST 469/569
FALL 2014

Professor Jeff Ostler
385 McKenzie Hall
Office Hours:
  Mon, 3:00-4:00
  Tues., 11:00-12:00
  Wed., 3:00-4:00
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Course Description:

Black Elk, an Oglala Lakota (Sioux), was born in 1863 and lived until 1950. As a young boy, he received a powerful vision in which spiritual beings took him to the center of the earth, the Black Hills of South Dakota. Black Elk was present when the Lakotas and their Cheyenne allies killed Custer on the Little Bighorn in 1876. He traveled to Europe with “Buffalo Bill” Cody’s Wild West Show, participated in the Ghost Dance movement that swept western Indian reservations in the late 1880s, and witnessed the Seventh Cavalry’s massacre of 250 of his people at Wounded Knee in 1890. In the early 1900s, Black Elk was baptized as a Catholic and spent many decades as a catechist, though in his later life, he went to the Black Hills to call on the spirits of his vision. Black Elk Speaks, an interpretation of his life written by John Neihardt, was first published in 1932 and has since become one of the most well-known texts in American Indian studies.

In this course we will use Black Elk Speaks as the basis for exploring several issues about the history and culture of the Lakota and Indian nations of the Great Plains from the 1800s to the present, including:

- the Black Hills, the center of Lakota territory and religion

- treaties between the Lakotas and the United States.

- Lakota strategies for dealing with the American invasion of their lands (including militant resistance and various kinds of accommodation).

- Lakotas’ relationships with other Indian nations, including the Cheyennes, Pawnees, Crows, and Arikaras.
• environmental and economic change, including the decline of bison populations and colonial economic relationships.

• the relationship between “traditional” Lakota religion and Christianity.

• scholarly debates about the extent to which Black Elk Speaks accurately portrays Black Elk’s life and his worldview.

• Lakotas and the modern world

Assignments:

1. A mid-term essay of 4 pages, due Monday, Nov. 3. (25%)

2. A longer paper (6-8 pages) on a topic related to the course, due at the time of the final exam (Wed., Dec. 10, 10:15). (25%)

3. A one-paragraph statement of the topic for the longer paper, due Wed., Nov. 19 (not graded, but failure to submit the statement will result in a penalty of one full grade on the paper).

4. Final exam, Wed., Dec. 10, 10:15. (25%)

5. Periodic quizzes on the readings. (15%, though failure to earning a passing grade on all quizzes combined will result in a deduction of an additional full grade).

6. Co-leading the discussion of the readings for one class period. This will involve working with one other class member to prepare a brief summary of the readings, including an identification of key issues and questions for the class. (10%). Note: possible dates for student-led discussions are marked with an asterisk on the schedule below.

[Note: Graduate students enrolled in HIST 569 have separate requirements.]

Readings:

John G. Neihardt, Black Elk Speaks (2014 “Complete Edition,” published by University of Nebraska Press). Available at UO Bookstore. Note: there are many editions of Black Elk Speaks, but it will be helpful, if all students use the same edition, so please acquire the 2014 edition.

Articles and Book excerpts (full list at the end of the syllabus). Available on Blackboard.
Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the features of the history and culture of a single American Indian nation.
2. Understand some of the challenges in interpreting the history and culture of American Indian people.
4. Develop an appreciation for the relationship between constraint and agency in history.
5. Improve synthetic and analytical writing skills.
6. Learn to identify interesting research topics.
7. Improve research skills using secondary sources.
8. Become more articulate in discussing historical materials.

Schedule:

Week 1:
9/29: Introduction: Black Elk and the history of Plains Indians
10/1: Lakotas and the Plains
   Reading: Irwin; Powers

Week 2:
10/6: Lakotas and U.S. to the 1868 Treaty
   Reading: 1868 Treaty; Negotiations with Brulés; Calico’s narrative; New York Times articles 1 & 2
10/8: Begin discussion of Black Elk Speaks
   Reading: Black Elk Speaks (through pp. 1-100); DeMallie 1

Week 3:
10/13: Conclude discussion of Black Elk Speaks
   Reading: Black Elk Speaks (pp. 101-172); DeMallie 2
10/15: Destruction of the bison*
   Reading: Krech; Isenberg

Week 4:
10/20: Little Bighorn and taking of the Black Hills
   Reading: Ostler 1; Report and Journal of Proceedings; Black Hills affidavits
10/22: Colonialism*
   Reading: Hoxie; Utley; Veracini
Week 5:
10/27: Colonialism—continued*
  Reading: Standing Bear; Amiotte; Ostler 2
10/29: Wild West shows*
  Reading: Moses

Week 6:
11/3:  Tecumseh to Wovoka*
  Reading: Dowd; Ruby and Brown; Mooney 1
  MID-TERM ESSAY DUE
11/5:  Black Elk’s engagement with the Ghost Dance/Wounded Knee
  Reading: Mooney 2; Miles

Week 7:
11/10: Black Elk and Christianity*
  Reading: Steltenkamp; Holler; Markowitz
11/12: Debates about Black Elk*
  Reading: Rice; Linden; Howard

Week 8:
11/17: Lakotas and modernity*
  Reading: Deloria; Swan
11/19: Black Hills, 1877- present
  PAPER TOPIC STATEMENT DUE

Week 9:
  Reading: Wilkinson
11/26: No class

Week 10:
12/1: Documentary: We Shall Remain: Wounded Knee, 1973
12/3: Return to Black Elk Speaks
  Reading: Reread Black Elk Speaks

FINAL EXAM: Wed., Dec. 10, 10:15

FINAL PAPER DUE: at the time of the final exam
LIST OF READINGS


5. Calico’s narrative of the 1868 Treaty (given to the instructor by Michael Her Many Horses).


13. Affidavits of Calico and John Blunt Horn on the Black Hills, 1919-1920, from the National Archives.


