History 982 - Interdisciplinary Graduate Seminar on “Narrating Native Histories in the Americas”

Spring 2005
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Course Description:

In the past generation, indigenous and first-people movements for sovereignty and cultural recognition have become a part of political debate in many parts of the world. Since the early 1970s, when Native activists from the Americas joined their brothers and sisters from other continents in helping to reformulate the UN agenda for indigenous peoples’ rights as a part of international human rights, indigenous demands for political and cultural recognition have generated a series of strong, identity-based Native movements that have challenged the integrationist policies of nation-states. As a part of this new political and cultural dynamism, Native peoples have also begun to generate their own intellectuals who have taken center stage in debates over cultural interpretation and translation, and over the narration of Native histories. In such a context, the intellectual agency of Native peoples themselves has been placed squarely on the agenda of all research and writing about and with indigenous societies. Scholars working on and collaborating with Native societies, whether themselves Native or non-Native, have therefore been challenged to rethink the ethical, methodological, and conceptual frameworks within which we locate our work on questions of Native histories and cultures.

Yet despite these challenges, how far have we really gone in changing the way indigenous histories are gathered, recorded, and told? In dialogue with the conference of the same name being held on the Madison campus April 7-10, this seminar will address this question from a variety of points of view and of locations within the Americas. We will examine all readings and their authors in methodological, geographical, historical, and epistemological context. Ultimately, our goal will be to consider the ethical and methodological implications of researching and writing about Native cultures, and to help formulate and foster appropriate forms of research, discussion and debate that take into account the sensibilities and knowledge that are a part of the Native cultures and societies being studied and analyzed.

Course Requirements:

1) Active participation in class. The core of our work in the course will be reading and discussion of abundant materials. Taking the time and energy to contribute to class discussion, whether with a comment, question, doubt, or criticism, is a crucial component of this. Active participation does not always mean speaking a lot, but it does mean listening to and engaging other people's ideas and comments, and being willing to risk asking a "stupid" question in order to move the discussion forward. The seminar's success depends on it!

2) Three short review essays (7-10 pp.), designed to explore more fully the common and additional readings assigned in a particular week. The students responsible for the review in each week will also get together and prepare a short presentation of no more than 15 minutes
on how the additional articles read for the week relate to the assigned common book. The review essays will be due no later than two weeks after the discussion of the topic on which they are based, with the obvious exception of the last two weeks of class and two weeks before Spring Break; you must all choose one of your topics from at least two of the three units in the class. Please hand in two copies so that both professors can read and comment separately.

3) Those not writing review essays in a particular week will write a 2-paragraph comment on the common reading to be discussed that week, and post it on our class email list by noon the Wednesday before class.

4) Your attendance at the April 7-10 conference will also be required.

4) Grading: Class participation: 40%
Review Essays: 20% each

SCHEDULE OF CLASS MEETINGS AND READINGS:

Thursday, Jan. 20- Organizational Meeting

UNIT I- Indigenous Revitalization, Activist Anthropology, and The Politics of Narrative


- Elicura Chihuailaf, Recado confidencial a los chilenos (Santiago: LOM Ediciones, 1999), pp. 159-214.

• Matilde Pérez U. y Laura Castellanos, ‘No nos dejen solas’: Entrevista con la comandante Ramona,” Rosa Rojas (comp.), *Chiapas, ¿Y las mujeres qué?,* pp. 26-40.


UNIT II- Ethnohistory, Orality, and Textuality in Indigenous Memory and History


Thursday, March 17- Thomas A. Abercrombie, Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, pp. xv-314, 408-422. Please note: given the unusual length and complexity of this book, the common reading will leave out Part Three except for the conclusion. However, people are encouraged to finish the book if possible, and Part Three, as you can see below, will be read and reported on by the reviewers.
• Abercrombie, Pathways of Memory and Power, pp. 315-407.

SPRING BREAK, March 19-27

UNIT III- Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State: Memory, Citizenship, and Identity


• Carmen Martínez Novo, “‘We Are Against the Government, Although We Are the Government’: State Institutions and Indigenous Migrants in Baja California in the 1990s,” Journal of Latin American Anthropology, 9(2), 2004, pp. 352-381.

PARTICIPATION IN OUR CONFERENCE

• Peter Guardino, “‘Toda libertad para emitir sus votos’: Plebeyos, campesinos y elecciones en Oaxaca, 1808-1850,” Cuadernos del Sur, año 6, núm. 15, junio 2000, pp. 87-114.


