

NAVAJO MYSTERIES AND CULTURE-II

THE FOUR CORNERS WITH TONY HILLERMAN

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Abstract

Read the Jim Chee/Joe Leaphorn mystery novels of Tony Hillerman, and study the Indian myths and cultural concepts they embody. The land is sacred to the Navajo, as reflected in their religion, arts, and weaving. While enjoying Mr. Hillerman's descriptions of southwestern landscapes and its people, review Navajo mythology with its beautiful descriptions of the cycle of life, the formation of the world, and the special reverence for land. Consider the relation of the Navajo to the Hopi and Pueblo peoples of the Anasazi migration. The course will provide an appreciation of Navajo concepts including "hozho," going in beauty and harmony with nature, and its reversal of witchcraft ("skinwalkers"). It will delve into the basis of tribal sovereignty and existing treaties to better understand the politics of cultural preservation. The course will also consider current Navajo issues, including the control and exploitation of mineral and energy resources and their impact on the Navajo Nation. Mr. Hillerman generally weaves current issues of importance to Indian Country into his work. This is a three-semester course in which the student should expect to read about 7 first class mystery novels each semester.

Course Operation

While reading and enjoying the Tony Hillerman mysteries, we will discuss the examples of Navajo religion, spirituality and culture portrayed in the stories. As the opportunity arises, we'll consider the treaties, U.S. policies, social experiments, and laws that have shaped our relations with the Navajo Nation (as well as those with all 562 federally recognized U.S. Indian tribes). I will integrate a discussion of the novels and their direct themes and descriptions, with sessions reviewing the concepts and issues to establish a context for the novels. We will open the second semester with a photo tour of Hillerman Country led by Anne Hillerman for Road Scholar.

Course Objectives

First and foremost to read and enjoy some excellent stories set in an exotic location (for an Easterner). Enjoy poetic descriptions of the land to appreciate why the Navajo, as do all Native Americans, love and revere the land. Using the Navajo experience we'll learn about Native American culture, religion, and politics including their role in the development of the United States. Finally we'll (hopefully) develop an understanding of the complexity and sophistication of Navajo culture and politics to appreciate how our indigenous cultures have survived 500 years of contact with Europeans in the contest for the land and its resources.

Novels to be Read

The following Tony Hillerman novels will be used in the second semester of the course:

- *Talking God* (1989). Political intrigue between Washington and Indian Country, and its impact on cultural preservation. The role of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act and subsequent battles for research materials.
- *The Dark Wind* (1982). Drug smuggling on the Big Res and the ambivalence of the Navajo to revenge. Contrasts between the Hopi and Navajo religious view of nature, and review of the Navajo-Hopi land dispute.
- *Skinwalkers* (1986). The everyday impact of Navajo witches on the Reservation. How the desire to do good is sometimes corrupted into evil.
- *Sacred Clowns* (1993). Jim Chee suffers conflicting beliefs as a shaman/chanter and tribal policeman as a web of pueblo politics unfolds.
- *The Fallen Man* (1996). The discovery of a skeleton 1700 feet up Ship Rock leads to intrigue from Colorado to Canyon de Chelly, all over the love of land.
- *The First Eagle* (1998). The Hopi-Navajo dispute regarding the taking of eagles for sacred ceremonies leads to dangerous experiments using plague bacteria and infected animals.

Suggested Additional Reading for background and Interest

- *Dine bahane*, Paul G. Zolbrod (1984). The Navajo origin myths as recorded and translated by a dedicated scholar of the Navajo culture and language. The most authoritative source of written information on the Navajo myths.
- *Hosteen Klah*, Franc Johnson Newcomb (1964). The biography of a Navajo medicine man by a woman stationed at a trading post, who became one of the most insightful writers on Navajo history and culture.
- *Desert Wife*, Hilda Faunce (1928). The stories of a woman who shared the operation of a remote trading post on the Navajo Reservation prior to W.W.I.
- *Talking to the Ground*, Douglas Preston (1995). The path taken by Monster Slayer and his brother Born for Water in their adventure to rid the 5th world of the monsters is “retraced” by a modern family. Excellent stories of Navajoland (Dine Bikayh) and its beautiful landscapes.

Please attempt to access the following Native American websites on a continuing basis. They provide a good review of current issues, and frequently have good material on historical and cultural items:

- www.indianz.com
- www.indiancountry.com
- www.navajotimes.com
- www.narf.org
- www.pechanga.net

COURSE SCHEDULE

Classes on Tuesday from 10:30-11:45am

<u>Class No.</u>	<u>Subject/Topics</u>
Week 1	Overview-Opening remarks. Course description and operation. Revisit the bio of Tony Hillerman and his craft based on his autobiography “Seldom Disappointed.” Consider Anne Hillerman’s book “Tony Hillerman’s Landscape” and tour Hillerman Country with her on a Road Scholar trip in 2012.
Week 2	Begin discussion of “Talking God” and review our plan of study of additional religious and political concepts. The additional legal protection of Native American religious and sacred artifacts provided by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).
Week 3	“Talking God” – Joe Leaphorn follows the trail of a terrorist group from Gallup to the Smithsonian and into the politics of cultural preservation.
Week 4	“The Dark Wind.” Contrasts of Hopi and Navajo myths and cultures. The role of the religious kiva (traditional religion) in daily life. The Federal presence on Native American reservations including the FBI/DEA (Major Crimes Act) and BIA (Trust Responsibility).
Week 5	The Hopi culture in the face of encroaching Anglo peoples and religions. The pressures to maintain Hopi culture including the “Man Corn” episode in the village of Awatovi. Review of the abandonment of Chaco Canyon (see Douglas Preston, “Talking to the Ground”). Consider the Hopi/Navajo Joint Use Land dispute and reference “The First Eagle” as well.

- Week 6 The impact of the Federal/Indian trust relationship. Operation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the ongoing effort to avoid or minimize financial liability under the Cobell trust fund accounting lawsuit.
- Week 7 “Skinwalkers”- Dealing with inexplicable events in Navajo culture. Discussion of the novel, and review of the concepts of witchcraft, chindi, death, and corpse powder. Reconsider the chindi images from “People of Darkness” and “Dance Hall of the Dead.”
- Week 8 “Sacred Clowns”- Pueblo ceremonies and governance. The humanizing role of the Koshare/sacred clown in Hopi culture. The story of the Lincoln canes and their role in southwestern politics and the succession of power.
- Week 9 “The Fallen Man”- The discovery of a skeleton near the top of Ship Rock creates an intriguing mystery for Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, stretching from Colorado to Canyon de Chelly. The exotic beauty of the Canyon and its formations including Spider Rock.
- Week 10 Navajo and Native American respect for the land. The role of land in Navajo myths and life, and the importance of land for maintaining Indian cultures.
- Week 11 Natural resource leasing under the trust responsibility. Navajo Experience with Peabody Coal and the pending court case regarding royalty payments. Tony Hillerman’s description of the land, mirroring the Navajo love of land and place. Selections from “The Blessingway,” “People of Darkness,” and “Dine bahane.”
- Week 12 “The First Eagle”- The hunt for bubonic plague vectors in the context of the Navajo-Hopi land disputes (see “Dark Wind” discussions) and continuing issues caused by the displacement of Navajo families. A bit of history regarding the former “partitioned lands.”
- Week 13 Summary of the course. A sharing of impressions of Tony Hillerman’s novels and their characterization of the Southwest and Native American cultures. Favorite books, passages, and comments offered by class members.

CATALOG ABSTRACT

NAVAJO MYSTERIES AND CULTURE

Continue reading the Jim Chee/Joe Leaphorn mystery novels of Tony Hillerman, and study the Indian myths and cultural concepts they incorporate. Enjoy Mr. Hillerman's descriptions of western landscape and its effect on people. Consider issues regarding the control and exploitation of Native Americans and their resources, and efforts to maintain their cultures.

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