

Bethany Lutheran College

Seminar Paper

Anna Wiechmann

Native American Culture and Governance

Professor John Boubel

March 19, 2014

Because I grew up only a few minutes away from the Mdewakanton Sioux Reservation in Prior Lake, one would assume that I was moderately familiar with Native American culture and lifestyle. Truthfully, I was ignorant. However, by taking HIST 403, Native American Culture and Governance, I was provided with so much more insight to the lives of Native Americans, both past and present. Despite this class only being one credit, between the lectures and research papers, I gained a comprehensive knowledge of the history, culture, and government of Native Americans, particularly in the Midwest. The content of this course was both informative and engaging, and will play a significant role in my classroom as a teacher.

The development, relocation, and conflict that categorize Native American history were huge topics to cover in the short amount of time allotted for this class. With course content starting out before European contact, we discussed the success of many native peoples in creating complete civilizations and also the potential that they could have had if not for the consequences of Europeans coming to the Americas.

I think that because of the Euro-American prejudices and biases held by many authors of our history textbooks, many students, formerly including myself, do not have the chance to examine the strength of Native American people prior to European contact, but rather are forced to focus on their role after Columbus's discovery of the Americas. It was very interesting to me to learn about just how successful the native people were in many aspects of life, especially agriculturally. I had not realized how widespread Native American communities were or that there were an estimated four million American Indians living in North America before history was even recorded.

During this course, we also focused on the more recent history, including the devastating effect of disease that the Europeans brought over the seas and the cruelty and conflict that

engulfed many Europeans contact with Native Americans. Although I had learned about some of the wars and conflicts which Native Americans and Euro-Americans were involved with, my previous history and social studies classes simply had not capture the magnitude of these events. The most interesting conflicts that were covered in this class were of the Battle at Wounded Knee, especially because the number of casualties is still unknown; and also the Minnesota Uprising, partially because of the tragic irony of mass executions of Native Americans, in the midst of a war for the emancipation of African Americans. Before studying this uprising, I had not realized how much of a history that Mankato had with Native Americans. It was strange to think that President Lincoln authorized this mass execution of Native Americans here in Mankato, after the Minnesota Uprising, while he in the midst of fighting for the rights of African Americans.

Although I did find the history aspect of the class very interesting, for me, the examination of Native American culture was much more engaging. I learned about the different characteristics of the Chippewa, the Ojibwe, and the Sioux. I was taught how there are four different branches of the Sioux, which are each named based on their location. Prior to this class, I did not understand the divisions between each tribe, but with lectures and the research I did on the Mdewakantan Sioux, that is no longer the case. Discussing the culture and economic state of each of the tribes really showcased their independence and effectiveness as a people. I was extremely impressed by the resilience of the Native Americans to maintain their language, culture, and way of life, in spite of the enormous challenges that they faced from Euro-Americans. For this class I watched “The World of American Indian Dance,” which showed how despite the dances, which were the glory and religion of their culture, being made illegal for a

period of time, Native American tribes have managed to preserve that beautiful art form along with many other aspects of their culture.

This examination of Native American culture culminated in the research I did on Native American learning styles. I found it very interesting to see how there were obvious trends regarding how Native Americans learn. This research also led me into the topic of the learning styles stereotypically associated with other ethnicities. The most important conclusion that I reached in this research was that regardless of the ethnicities of your students, all teaching needs to be appropriately geared towards a wide variety of learning styles. This is something that I will definitely keep in mind in my own classroom.

I learned a lot of great information during this course, and I think that is largely due to the format of this class. I thought that the presentations that we each gave on individual tribes were extremely useful, not only in conveying information about each tribe, but these presentations also gave each of us practice in obtaining information and effectively relaying it to the rest of a class. The use of lecture was an efficient way to convey the vast amount of material, although students may have been more able to enjoy each class period, if they had had a chance to participate actively.

Approaching the information of this subject as we did, from multiple perspectives, helped me to really realize that a person's perspective and cultural values shape their interpretation of history, and also that it is an educator's responsibility to find and utilize unbiased sources, in order to teach in a factual manner.

My personal goal in education is to teach English Literature at the high school level. This class has prepared me in a variety of ways for such a career, including: practice doing personal research and presenting information, and it provided me with great information regarding the

history and culture that shape Native American values and learning styles. This class also sparked my interest in Native American authors. Since this class began, I have now read works by N. Scott Momaday and Paula Gunn Allen; authors that I believe should be included in the literary canon and will definitely be a part of my curriculum. This class gave me the background information that I will need, as an English teacher, to teach the context and significance of the works of these authors and other like them. Because this class was engaging, informative, and applicable, I am even more excited and prepared to lead my own classroom one day.

References

The World of American Indian Dance. Dir. Dan Jones and Randy Martin. Four Directions Entertainment, 2003. DVD.