

**History 353: Native American History to 1865**  
**Fall 2022**  
**Dr. Alexander Olson**  
**Western Kentucky University**

Email: alexander.olson@wku.edu  
Office hours: any weekday by appointment

**Course Description:**

*“Contact was not a battle of primal forces in which only one could survive. Something new could appear.”*

-Richard White, *The Middle Ground* (1991)

In the 2010 U.S. census, only 0.3% of the population of Kentucky identified as American Indian. Many residents of the commonwealth have never interacted with Indian people. And yet, huge swaths of the United States are sovereign Indian lands. Twelve of the nation’s 310 reservations are larger than Rhode Island. The Navajo Nation alone is larger than ten states, including West Virginia. And the single highest concentration of Native Americans is in New York City, with 111,000 American Indian residents. Far from being the “vanishing race” portrayed in Hollywood, the thousands of enrolled tribal members in the US include doctors, politicians, entrepreneurs, and participants in every other aspect of American society.

This course introduces students to Native American History prior to 1865. We will examine the hidden history of Indian power as manifested in the diverse histories of indigenous groups in North America and the Pacific World. As late as the mid-1800s, indigenous empires like the Comanche and Lakota dominated the central plains, even as they were erased from maps that continue to circulate in modern textbooks. In these spaces, Euro-Americans depended on tribal power brokers for access to trade routes and security, and these relationships shaped the fate of empires. Contrary to stereotypes of Indian cultures as primitive, a new wave of scholarship has brought to light stories of hybridity, complexity, and change that cast Native American people as important and powerful players in shaping the modern world.

**Note on the Native American History sequence at WKU:**

This class is the first half of a two-course sequence, the second of which—History 354—will cover the period from 1865 to the present. These two courses can be taken independently and do not require or assume any prior knowledge from the other.

**Required Texts:**

- Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill: A Cherokee Plantation Story* (UNC Press, 2010).
- Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008).
- Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford University Press, 2005).
- Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).
- David Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
- Required Film: *Moana* (2016). Available on Disney+.
- Additional readings are available on Blackboard

## Course Structure:

This course will be taught asynchronously, which means there is no specific time when everybody will be logged on simultaneously. There will be no quizzes, exams, or zoom meetings. Instead, 70% of your grade is based on your writing in the discussion board. Rather than memorizing facts, you should think of this class as a college-level book club where we will analyze, critique, and discuss the readings. In addition to the discussion board, there are three essay assignments worth a total of 30% of your grade.

**Monday and Tuesday:** These days are reserved strictly for reading. On Tuesday night, I will post a set of framing remarks to guide the discussion.

**Wednesday:** Each student will submit a 500-word post (which can be longer if you wish) to the Blackboard discussion board. This post is due by Wednesday at 11:59pm each week.

**Thursday and Friday:** Each student will post a minimum of 500 words spread across at least three replies (not including your Wednesday post) responding to the posts submitted by your fellow students. These responses are due by Friday at 11:59pm each week.

## Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will master basic frameworks for understanding American Indian history. These frameworks include law and policy, aesthetic and cultural production, modernity, and the politics of resistance and accommodation.
2. Students will identify and utilize primary sources to develop credible interpretations of the past. This course supports WKU's Quality Enhancement Plan, *Evidence & Argument*.
3. Students will gain an appreciation for the diversity of indigenous groups in North America and the Pacific World.
4. Through intensive weekly discussion boards, students will explore American Indian history in sufficient detail to achieve a measure of expertise.
5. Students will be able to articulate how American Indian history is embedded global networks of political, economic, and cultural exchange.

## Note on Language when discussing Native American History:

In general terms, you can't really go wrong with "Native American" or "American Indian." A specific name (Dakota, Diné, Tuscarora, etc.) is appropriate when you're discussing a specific tribe. The term "Indian country" refers to the many self-governing Native communities across the United States (the leading news outlet of Native America is *Indian Country Today*: <https://indiancountrytoday.com/>). The term "Indian" is not considered derogatory, but it can be confused with people from the Asian nation of India, which is why the terms Native American or American Indian are generally preferred unless it is clear from context. On the other hand, plainly racist language (such as the former name of Washington DC's professional football team) is off-limits in this class.

If you're talking about Canada, then use "First Nations." "Aboriginal" is okay in Canada as an adjective and is particularly useful in discussing issues related to historical events or legacies (aboriginal land title, for example). But not so much "aborigine," which would put you in Australia. "Tribal" functions a bit the same way, as an adjective with positive connotations (not to be confused with the generally pejorative meaning of the word as it is applied to contemporary American politics). "Indigenous" is a great word for generalizing in a global sense, especially for drawing parallels between indigenous people of the Pacific Islands and North America. And yes, ending each of these terms with "people" is a great idea. Finally, since *sovereignty* is one of the main stakes in this field, it's helpful—and accurate—to use "nation" when describing Indian people in discussions of law, policy, and politics.

**Technology Requirements:**

Students are required to have access to a computer and reliable Internet connection to write and submit your assignments. To avoid losing your work in progress, you are encouraged to compose your drafts in a word processing program before submitting your posts on Blackboard. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard, visit the [Orientation for Online Learners](#) before the course begins. If you have any problems using the online tools for this course, please contact me as soon as possible.

**Grading Scale:**

A (90-100%, or 900-1000 points)  
B (80-89%, or 800-899 points)  
C (70-79%, or 700-799 points)  
D (60-69%, or 600-699 points)  
F (0-59%, or 0-599 points)

**Late Assignments and Academic Dishonesty:**

Timely participation in the discussion board is integral to this class. *Late submissions are the online equivalent of speaking aloud to an empty classroom after class has been dismissed.* Accordingly, late submissions that are unexcused will result in a penalty of 10 points per day. Acts of plagiarism or any other form of cheating will not be tolerated and can incur serious punishment, including a failing grade in the class. Please read the relevant section of the [WKU Student Handbook](#).

**RSI Statement:**

The U.S. Department of Education requires that distance education courses must include regular and substantive interaction between students and faculty. For more information about RSI at WKU, please visit the [Regular and Substantive Interaction in Online and Distance Learning](#) webpage. In this course, regular and substantive interaction will take place in the following ways:

- Assignments and assessment deadlines that are spread throughout the term of the class,
- Announcements that frame weekly discussions and/or follow up on past discussions,
- Timely assessment and explanation of grade for individual weekly discussion posts,
- Detailed and constructive feedback on essay assignments, which identifies specifically what has been done correctly, needs improvement, or guides students to the next steps of learning.

**History Tutoring:**

The History Success Center provides free tutoring services for all students enrolled in history classes, including HIST 353. Tutors are available to go over any aspect of the class. The tutors this semester are Kaci, Vanessa, Kaitlin, Brooklyn, and Chloe. Appointments will be offered both digitally (5-7pm daily including weekends) and in Cherry Hall 202 (10:30am-2pm on weekdays). We are also offering "Tutoring Tuesdays" (with appointments available 8am-8pm every Tuesday by Zoom). To make an appointment for free History tutoring, visit <https://calendly.com/wkuhistory/>

**ADA Notice:**

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, Room 1074. The SARC can be reached by phone at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at [sarc.connect@wku.edu](mailto:sarc.connect@wku.edu). Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from SARC.

**Problems?**

If you are struggling or not getting the grades that you want, please contact me. Don't wait until things seem dire. I am here to help you! I am happy to answer questions by email, and we can make an appointment to speak by Zoom or phone. My office hours are any weekday by appointment.

## Assignments and Grade Breakdown

There are a total of 1000 points available based on the following breakdown. Please note the very high proportion of the grade based on weekly discussions. *The best way to succeed in this class is to do the readings every week.* Our goal is not to memorize facts and arrive at a “right” answer, but rather to engage deeply and critically with the readings.

### 1) Discussions—700 points (70% of grade)

Each week, you must write one 500-word-minimum original post (due by Wednesday at 11:59pm) and three shorter responses to your classmates’ posts (due by Friday at 11:59pm). The three shorter responses should be at least 500 words combined, not counting your Wednesday post. Each thread is worth 50 points. Your grade is divided equally between your main post (25 points) and responses (25 points). An additional 50 points will be awarded at the end of the semester based on a holistic assessment of your participation. Although you can write with a conversational tone, you are expected to proofread all submissions. You will not receive full credit for posts that simply mirror my remarks rather than demonstrating your own thoughts. Please note that there will be no discussion during week 8 (Fall Break) or week 14 (Thanksgiving Break).

### 2) Starting Point Essay—50 points (5% of grade)

Please write a short essay (minimum 500 words) summarizing, to the best of your recollection, the main themes about Native American history that were taught in your previous high school and college history classes, particularly US History and World History. Our goal with this assignment is to pool our experiences to build a collective diagnosis of how Native history is taught in history classes. Upload your essay to the Essay Assignments section on Blackboard. **Due on 9/2**

### 3) Textbooks and the Comanche Empire—150 points (15% of grade)

For this assignment, you will be provided with excerpts describing US-Mexico War from several popular US History textbooks. These textbooks are assigned in thousands of classrooms every year, and their short summaries of the US-Mexico War represent the conventional history of the conflict that students are expected to learn. Your assignment has three parts, each of which should be clearly marked with a subheading in your essay:

- 1) Synthesize (minimum 400 words): Please summarize the basic plot of the territorial conflict between the United States and Mexico as presented in the assembled textbooks. What are some common themes in the excerpts? Which individuals or groups receive the most attention? Are the textbooks in agreement about the causes of the war?
- 2) Challenge (minimum 500 words): Please explain how Comanche history complicates the histories of the US-Mexico War found in the textbooks. You must use Hämäläinen’s *The Comanche Empire* and Delay’s “Forgotten Foes” to support your argument. You are free to critique any aspect of the textbooks, including maps and images.
- 3) Reflect (minimum 400 words): Stepping back, please reflect on some of reasons why the history of the Comanche empire is largely invisible in the excerpted textbooks.

Please support your essay with specific examples from the textbook excerpts and readings. Upload your essay to the Essay Assignments section on Blackboard. **Due on 10/12.**

### 3) Indigenous Languages—100 points (10% of grade)

Each of the five required books in this class—*An Infinity of Nations*, *The World and All the Things Upon It*, *The House on Diamond Hill*, *The Comanche Empire*, and *Mohawk Saint*—makes extensive use of vocabulary from indigenous languages. For this reflection essay (minimum 800 words), please discuss some of the specific ways that indigenous terminology in historical scholarship can deepen our understanding of past events. You may utilize any of the assigned books or articles for this class. Upload your essay to the Essay Assignments section on Blackboard. **Due on 12/5.**

## Schedule

Readings are due the week they are listed on the syllabus. You are expected to read carefully, not skim. Aside from books required for purchase, all readings can be found in the Content section of Blackboard. As stated above, it might be helpful to think of this class as a college-level “book club” where we can exchange our ideas about the readings without seeking a “right” answer.

### **Weekly structure:**

**Monday and Tuesday:** These days are reserved strictly for reading. On Tuesday evening, I will post a set of framing remarks to guide the discussion.

**Wednesday:** Each student will submit a 500-word post (which can be longer if you wish) to the Blackboard discussion board addressing the weekly readings.

**Thursday and Friday:** Each student will post a minimum of 500 words spread across at least three comments responding to the posts submitted by your fellow students. You are encouraged to check back several times on Thursday and Friday to keep up with the discussion.

### **Readings and Deadlines:**

#### **Week 1** (Aug. 22-26): Introduction to Native American History

- David Treuer, *Rez Life* (2012), 1-9.
- Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (2009), 1-6.
- Philip Deloria, “What Tecumseh Fought For” (2020).

#### **Week 2** (Aug. 29-Sept. 2): Introduction to Federal Indian Law

- Charles Wilkinson, *Indian Tribes as Sovereign Governments* (2004), 3-9 and 29-36.
- Stephen Breyer, “The Cherokee Indians and the Supreme Court” (2003), 408-426.
- Erin Blackmore, “Sequoyah, the U.S. state that almost existed” (2020).

- **Essay:** Starting Point essay due by Friday, September 2nd, at 11:59pm.

#### **Week 3** (Sept. 5-9): Blood Quantum and Indian Identity

- Kim TallBear, “20th Century Tribal Blood Politics,” *The Great Vanishing Act* (2017), 129-139.
- Justin Wingerter, “For Cherokees, the Elizabeth Warren dispute goes to the heart of their identity,” *The Oklahoman*, October 17, 2018.
- Scott Jaschik, “Fake Cherokee?” *Inside Higher Ed*, July 6, 2015.
- Paul Chaat Smith, *Everything You Know about Indians Is Wrong* (2009), 64-66.
- Listen: “Can a DNA test make me Native American?” *All My Relations Podcast*, March 12, 2019.

#### **Week 4** (Sept. 12-16): Slavery and the Cherokee Nation

- Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill* (2010), 1-107.

#### **Week 5** (Sept. 19-23): Interwoven Histories in the Native South

- Tiya Miles, *The House on Diamond Hill* (2010), 109-197.

#### **Week 6** (Sept. 26-29): The Comanche Empire

- Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (2008), 1-17 and 141-180.
- Juliana Barr, *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (2007), 1-15.

**Week 7** (Oct. 3-7): Greater Comanchería and the US-Mexico War

- Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (2008), 181-238, 292-320, and 342-361.
- Brian DeLay, "Forgotten Foes," *Berkeley Review of Latin American Studies* (Fall 2010): 14-19.

**Week 8** (Oct. 10-14): Essay Writing (Oct. 10-12) and Fall Break (Oct. 13-14)

- Excerpts from miscellaneous US History textbooks for your essay
- No discussion board this week
  - **Essay:** "Textbooks and the Comanche Empire" essay due by Wed., Oct 12th, at 11:59pm.

**Week 9** (Oct. 17-21): Gaazagaskwaajimekaag and the Native New World

- Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2011), 1-21, 116-167.

**Week 10** (Oct. 24-28): The Illusion of Empire

- Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2011), 168-266.

**Week 11** (Oct. 31-Nov. 4): Christianity at Kahnawà:ke

- Allan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (2005), 3-24, 89-146, and 193-205.
- Watch: "Saint Kateri and Native American Catholics" (2015). 8 minutes.

**Week 12** (Nov 7-11): Treaties

- Charles Wilkinson, *Indian Tribes as Sovereign Governments* (2004), 93-98.
- Joshua Reid, "I Want the Sea," *The Sea is My Country* (2015), 124-163.

**Week 13** (Nov. 14-18): Exploration

- David Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (2016), vii-77

**Week 14** (Nov. 21-25): Thanksgiving Break

- No assigned readings or discussion board this week.

**Week 15** (Nov. 28-Dec. 2): The Indigenous Pacific World

- David Chang, *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration* (2016), 103-155.
- Epeli Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands" (1993)
- Watch: *Moana* (2016). *Streaming on Disney+*.
  - **Essay:** "Indigenous Languages" essay due by Monday, December 5th, at 11:59pm.