

Transcript Summary

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Narrator: Lary Schafer, professor at UAF

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(silence)

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Instructor Lary Schafer introduces himself and welcomes students to Humanities 294, Native American Religions. This is Tape Number Three. He talks about the questions in Assignment Two. He notes that many students have completed the first assignment and for the most part, they're quite good. He suggests reading the assignment thoroughly and not going beyond the assignment by, for instance, reading extra materials. He encourages students to make sure they understand the questions and are satisfied with their answers. He notes that some students confused personal power with impersonal power. He asks students not to answer the question just for the sake of having something to send to him as that wastes both his time and theirs. He hopes the course is designed to give students some sense of Native American religion from a number of different perspectives including the perspective of those who are not practitioners. The first assignment dealt with sociological and anthropological approaches to religion. Now Schafer wants students to see the relationship of religion to the natural social environment. Man affects his natural surroundings and natural surroundings affect man. Man's social and religious structures very often reflect the influences of the natural environment. For American Indians, religion was closely bound up with the natural environment because their whole life was bound up with the natural environment. One can look at the religion and it will tell a lot of other things about the society as well.

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Schafer says Underhill gives examples of different environments, including those of the Northwest coast, Plains, Southeast, and Southwest Indians. The first question for the assignment talks about how war ceremonies were different for many Indian groups. This difference had to do with the environment the

peoples lived in. Schafer asks the students for a short essay discussing the main differences between Indian group war ceremonies and how these differences might be related to the environment. In her book, Underhill covers various groups including those of the Southwest, including the Pima and Hopi, and each of these groups had a different perception of war. For the Plains Indians, war was a very important part of their whole social structure. Schafer says their leaders were built upon war activities, as well as their hunting and religion. Warfare became formalized, such as in the act of counting coup, where the greatest honor you can take in a battle is to ride in and touch your enemy with a stick, not killing them, but to touch a live enemy and ride back out. The men who did this were highly honored. The object is not necessarily to slaughter whole populations of people but to gain individual honor for various deeds, which didn't include killing. Peoples who relied on planting, including the Zuni and Hopi, disliked war very much, and thought the people who waged war were sorcerers and witches – their words for the Apache and Navajo, who raided and waged war against more peaceful planting Indians.

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Schafer says that if you examine social organization and the natural surroundings, you can see that the natural surroundings may have influenced different perceptions of war. These differences were manifested in ceremonies. Underhill writes about how different the ceremonies were between Plains Indians and groups that primarily relied on planting. Schafer asks students to write a page discussing ceremonies in the warring tribes and planter tribes and discuss the differences between them and how these differences might be related to the environment.

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Schafer then asks students to briefly describe the relationships of the Sun Dance to the natural and social environment of the Plains Indians. There are readings on the Sun Dance describing this. Plains Indians have horses and are able to kill buffalo and travel great distances. This food allows many people to stay together for a long time. Then larger bands and tribes can come together and have ceremonies, because the natural environment supplied the sustenance for them to do so. The Plains Indians had no permanent temple or paraphernalia, because they traveled a lot and packed on their back and on horses and dogs. There was no way they could really have a permanent temple or paraphernalia for ceremonies. And because of the warfare systems, if they went back to the same place continually, they might be set up for ambush. There was no organized priesthood. People often took upon themselves the responsibility of setting up a Sun Dance, and becoming a sponsor for one. They were a wandering people with a loosely organized priesthood.

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Schafer says that the Plains area was large and there was no chance of just sitting in one spot. This forced a certain type of religious social organization upon the people. The Sun Dance ceremony was important for warriors. As the environment changed, and as modern times came on, the ceremony's goals changed too. Underhill talks about this as does Deloria. The Sun Dance was about the return and blessing of the buffalo. Almost all the tribal groups did this. But the buffalo were eliminated. So instead of a buffalo blessing, a general blessing of the people became the goal of the Sun Dance ceremony, and this is more or less what it is today. This shows that as the environment changes, the ceremonies and goals of the ceremonies changed too. Black Elk has a number of things to say about the Sun Dance and the Sioux. Schafer tells students that using some of Black Elk's information in answers to questions would boost their assignments.

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Schafer discusses the third question, which asks students to summarize two common elements found in the religions of those who practice agriculture. An example is how the role of women in agriculture is different from that in societies that have no agriculture. Women have roles and functions. They have power because of their fertility, which is related to Mother Earth. Women perform planting and take care of gardens. Another example is the process of purification or eliminating physical, mental or spiritual contamination; everything had to be renewed. There are many thanksgiving ceremonies in Indian groups that practice agriculture. There was a big emphasis on the seasons, which is important to people who plant and rely on rain. Another example that seems to be significant according to Underhill is the phenomenon of sacrifice. Most tribes seem to have some form of sacrifice to renew the system that they belong to. This ranges from human sacrifice to the smoking of tobacco. Another example is the complexity of ceremonies and religious social organization. Non-warring tribes seem to have much more sophisticated ceremonies than those of the Plains Indians and other warrior or hunting groups that weren't engaged in agriculture. Schafer asks students to tell him what they think and come up with insights on the phenomena that run through mostly religious systems.

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Schafer talks about the final question in the assignment, which asks for three or four examples of how the natural environment influenced religion among the Sioux. He encourages students to look at Underhill's book and refer to the index to look up all the pages under Sioux. *Black Elk Speaks* is also about the Sioux and their relationship to the natural environment and its relationship to religion. Schafer tells students they may have to read between the lines and analyze what Black Elk is saying. Underhill provides theory of Plains culture and religion, and *Black Elk* gives specific examples of how this theory was actually manifested. Schafer says the answer to the question would total about one full page. There are many examples in the book, but students should just pick three or four to explore in depth rather than just listing a whole bunch of them.

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Schafer says he will try to get out another tape by the middle of April. The tape will cover chapters in "God is Red." He is curious to hear student responses to the course and wants feedback for whether they are happy with it or really disgusted with it or find it a pain in the neck. He is pleased with student responses to assignments so far. There was some confusion over the difference between personal power and impersonal power. He encourages students to see their field coordinators for help. There is no hurry to submit the assignments, so it is best to wait and write to him or ask a field coordinator if a student has any questions. Schafer says that for some of the assignments, he strongly suspects that students didn't do the reading, because many of the answers are right in the book. Some people used other sources. He tells students to do whatever they feel like.

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Schafer wraps up the tape and says that maybe he'll see some of the students soon. He is going to Fairbanks tonight for the dog races this weekend. He asks students again for feedback on the course and tells them not to be afraid to be critical or to be complimentary if that's the case. He says his plane will be leaving in about two hours so he needs to get home and pack, and that he hopes to see some of the students in Fairbanks. He tells the students good luck until next time.

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