

Asians in the Americas: A Comparative Perspective

Fall 2008

Course No. Anthropology 3703/Asian American Studies 3030

URH G26: TR 1:25- 2:40

Instructor: Professor Viranjini Munasinghe

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Office Hours: Friday 11-12 Rockefeller 425 (Walk in hours); and Friday 1:30-3:00 205 McGraw (need to sign up—sign up sheet on office door).

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Course Overview:

Ethnicity is often perceived as a "natural" or inevitable consequence of cultural difference. "Asians" overseas, in particular, have won repute as a people who cling tenaciously to their culture and refuse to assimilate into their host societies and cultures. But, **who are “Asians?” Who are “Asian Americans?”** What does a fourth generation Chinese-American have in common with a Kampuchean refugee who fled to the U.S in 1975 or a South Indian doctor who came to America looking for professional advancement, say in the 1960s? On what basis can we label "Asians" an ethnic group? Although there is a significant Asian presence in the Caribbean, the category "Asian" itself is not common in the Caribbean. What does this say about the nature of categories which label and demarcate groups of people on the basis of alleged cultural and phenotypic characteristics?

This course will examine the dynamics behind group identity, namely ethnicity, by comparing and contrasting the multicultural experience of Asian populations in the Caribbean, and the United States. Ethnographic case studies will focus on East Indian and Chinese experiences in the Caribbean and some parts of Latin America and “Asian”/“Asian American,”—Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, South Asian, Vietnamese etc.-- experiences in the United States. The comparative method will be used to deconstruct the popular notion that ethnicity is a uniform phenomenon by exploring diverse expressions of ethnicity in the Americas. The final part of the course will address pressing issues in contemporary cultural politics of Asian American identity, such as how this identity is informed by gender, race and class differences, conflict between generations, relations between diaspora and homeland, and how identities are formed through youth culture.

The course is structured in three parts. The first is a theoretical overview of some major anthropological approaches to ethnicity. The second and third parts will concentrate on ethnographic examples--first, from the Caribbean and Latin America and second, from the United States.

Course Requirements:

1. Class attendance and participation. For each class students will be expected to come prepared with 2 or more questions/issues related to the readings (1 page). Your

comments will be used as a basis for class discussion and will be collected at the end of each class. 25%

2. One 15 minute presentation on the final paper. 25%
3. One 10-12 page final research paper that focuses on an "Asian" group in the Caribbean and/or the US which explores any dimension of ethnic identity using theoretical issues raised in class and the readings. **The final paper must incorporate a theoretical analysis of your specific empirical case study. Due December 5th. 50%**

“Each Student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work.”

Required Texts:

1. Reader: “Asians in the Americas”
2. Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore, Boston: Little Brown and Company.
4. Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine. Do not buy yet—we may change this reading. All readings are available at the Campus Book Store and at the Asian American Studies Resource Center 420 Rockefeller]

Syllabus

1. Theories of Ethnicity

Aug. 28 **Introduction**

Sep. 2 **"Primordialism"** (focus mostly on the Geertz essay)

1. Geertz (1973) "The integrative revolution" in The Interpretation of Cultures.
2. Isaacs (1974) "Basic group identity: Idols of the tribe." Ethnicity 1: 15-42.

Recommended Readings:

1. Shils (1957) "Primordial, personal, sacred and civil ties." British Journal of Sociology

Sep. 4 **"Situationalism"**

1. Barth (1969) "Introduction" in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries.
2. Eidheim (1969) "When ethnic identity is a social stigma" in Ethnic Groups and Boundaries.

Recommended readings:

1. Moerman (1965) "Who are the Lue?" American Anthropologist 67: 1215-1230.
2. ----- (1968) "Being Lue: uses and abuses of ethnic identification," in Essays on Problem of the Tribe.
3. Naroll (1964) "On ethnic unit classification." Current Anthropology 5: 283-312.
4. ----- (1967) "Who the Lue Are." In Essays on the Problem of Tribe.
5. Cohen (1969) Custom and Politics in Urban Africa. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
6. Okmura (1981) "Situational ethnicity." Ethnic and Racial Studies 4 (3):452-465.

Sep. 9 **Terminology and the state: Ethnicity, Race and Minorities**

1. Sanjek, Roger (1994) "The Enduring Inequalities of Race," in Race. Eds., Roger Sanjek and Steven Gregory. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
2. Vincent (1974) "The structuring of ethnicity." Human Organization 33:375-379.
3. Munasinghe, V. (1977) "Culture Bearers and Culture Creators": The Interface between Race and Ethnicity in Trinidad." Transforming Anthropology

Sep. 11 general discussion /or **film: Ancestors in the Americas**

2. *Asians in the Caribbean*

Sep. 16 **Film: Mirrors of the Heart**

1. Mintz, Sidney (1966) "The Caribbean as a Socio-Cultural Area. Journal of World History 9 (4): 912-937.

Sep. 18 **Introduction to the Caribbean: Ethnicity, Creole Society and Stratification**

2. Safa (1987) "Popular culture, national identity and race in the Caribbean." New West Indian Guide 61 (3,4):115-126.
3. Naipaul (1967) "The Baker's story" in A Flag on the Island:133-146.
4. Crowley (1957) "Plural and differential acculturation in Trinidad." American Anthropologist Vol. 59.

Recommended Readings:

3. M.G. Smith (1965) The Plural Society in the British West Indies. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

4. Braithwaite (1971) The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820. London: Oxford University Press.

Sep. 23 **East Indians in the Caribbean**

Film: Chutney (start reading)

1. Munasinghe (2001) "Redefining the Nation: The East Indian struggle for inclusion in Trinidad." Journal of Asian American Studies.

2. Jayawardena (1980) "Culture and ethnicity in Guyana and Fiji." Man 15:430-450.

3. Parmasad (1973) "By the light of the Deya" in The Aftermath of Sovereignty, eds., Lowenthal and Comitas.

Recommended Readings:

Case Study: East Indians in Trinidad.

4. Niehoff 1960 East Indians in the West Indies. Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology, No. 6.

5. Klass 1961 East Indians in Trinidad. New York: Columbia University Press.

6. Trotman (1989) "Image of Indians in Calypso" in Indenture and Exile, ed., Frank Birbalsingh, Toronto: TSAR.

Sep. 30 Continue discussion of East Indians in the New World.

(Complete reading above)

Oct. 2 **Chinese in the Caribbean and Latin America**

1. Patterson (1975) "Context and choice in ethnic allegiance: A theoretical framework and Caribbean case study" in Ethnicity: Theory and Experience, eds., Glazer and Moynihan.

2. Pinneda, Baron (2001) "The Chinese Creoles of Nicaragua: Identity, Economy, and Revolution in a Caribbean Port City." Journal of Asian American Studies, 4 (3) 209-233.

3. Asians in the United States

Oct. 7 **Between or outside the black /white binary? Chinese in the United States**

1. Lipsitz, George (1998) The Possessive Investment in Whiteness. [Introduction and Chapter 1]
2. Takaki (1989) Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans. [Chapter 1, 2, 3 and 6]

Oct. 9 **Film: Chinese in the Frontier West**

Recommended readings:

2. Sucheng Chan (1991) Asian Americans: An interpretive history. Boston: Twayne Publishers. [Chapters 2 and 3]
3. Lyman (1976) "Conflict and the web of group affiliation in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1850-1910" in The Asian American: The Historical Experience. Norris Hundley ed., Santa Barbara: Clio Books.

Oct. 14 Fall Break

Oct. 16 **Japanese and Koreans in the United States**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 5 and 7]

Oct. 21 **South Asians and Filipinos in the United States**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 8 and 9]

Oct. 23 general discussion

Oct. 28 **World War II and the Asian American Challenge to American Society**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 10]

Recommended readings:

2. Choy (1991) "Racial order and contestation: Asian American Internees and soldiers at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, 1942-1943" in Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives, eds., Hune, Kim et al, Pullman, Washington: Washington State University Press.
3. Sucheng Chan (1991) "Changing fortunes, 1941 to 1965," in Asian Americans: An Interpretive History. [Chapter 7]

Oct. 30 **Asian American Identity and Heterogeneity: Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class.**

1. Espiritu, Yen Le (1992) "Coming Together: The Asian American Movement" in Asian American Panethnicity, pp., 19-52. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
2. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 11 and 12]

Nov. 4 **Where is the Common Ground?**

1. Espiritu, Yen Le and Paul Ong (1994) "Class constraints on racial solidarity among Asian Americans," in eds., Ong et al, The New Asian Immigration and Global Restructuring, pp., 295-322.
2. Espiritu, Yen Le (1997) "Ideological Racism and Cultural Resistance" in Asian American Women and Men, pp., 86-107. London: Sage.

Nov. 6 **Film: Miss India Georgia**

1. Mukherjee, Bharati, Jasmine

Nov. 11 **Immigrant/Cosmopolitan/Diaspora**

Continue Jasmine

Nov. 13 Final discussion

Nov. 18 Presentations

Nov. 20 No Class—American Anthropological Association Meetings

Nov. 25 Presentations

Nov. 27 Thanksgiving Break

Dec. 2 Presentations

Dec. 4 Presentations

December 5 FINAL PAPER DUE—Please note Academic Integrity Statement on Page 1. (Please include a stamped and addressed envelope if you wish your paper to be mailed to you with my comments—If there is no envelope I will assume you will not be collecting your paper and therefore not write comments on the paper)