Asians in the Americas: A Comparative Perspective  
Fall 2010  
Course No. Anthropology 3703/Asian American Studies 3030  
McGraw Hall B65  
TR 1:25-2:40

Instructor: Professor Viranjini Munasinghe  
Office: McGraw 205  
Office Hours: Tuesday 3:00-4:00 and Friday 1:30-3:00. You need to sign up for office hours—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 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 the dynamics of 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 (approx. 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 3. 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”

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. 26 Introduction

Aug. 31 "Primordialism" (focus mostly on the Geertz essay)


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

Sep. 2 "Situationalism"

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.

**Sep. 7**

**Power of Classification: Ethnicity, Race and Minorities**


**Sep. 9**

general discussion /or **Film: Ancestors in the Americas**

**2. Asians in the Caribbean**

**Sep. 14**

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


**Sep. 16**

**Film: Mirrors of the Heart**

Recommended Readings:

**Sep. 21**

**East Indians in the Caribbean**


Recommended Readings:
Case Study: East Indians in Trinidad.

Sep. 23  **Film: Chutney**  
1. Lisa Yun. The Coolie Speaks (begin reading book )

Sep. 28  **Chinese in the Caribbean and Latin America**  
Lisa Yun. The Coolie Speaks (continue)

Sep. 30  

3. **Asians in the United States**

Oct. 5  **Between or outside the black /white binary? Chinese in the United States**  
2. Takaki (1989) Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans. [Chapter 1, 2, 3 and 6]

Oct. 7  **Film: Chinese in the Frontier West**

Recommended readings:

Oct. 12   Fall Break

Oct. 14   **Japanese in the United States**
1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 5]

Oct. 19   **Koreans in the United States**
1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 7]

Oct. 21   **South Asians in the United States**
1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 8]

Oct. 26   **Filipinos in the United States**
1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 9]

Oct. 28   **World War II and the Asian American Challenge to American Society**
1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 10]

Recommended readings:

Nov. 2-4   **Asian American Identity and Heterogeneity: Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class.**
2. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 11 and 12]
Nov. 9  **Where is the Common Ground?**


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


Nov. 16  **Film: Miss India Georgia**

Manalansan, Martin. *Global Divas*, (continue)

Nov. 18  No Class—American Anthropological Association Meetings

Nov. 23  Manalansan, Martin. *Global Divas*, (continue)

Nov. 25  Thanksgiving Break

Nov. 30  Presentations

Dec. 2  Presentations

**December 3 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)