

Asians in the Americas: A Comparative Perspective

Fall 2012

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 2:30-3:30. 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 reputations 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 that label and demarcate groups of people on the basis of alleged cultural and phenotypic characteristics? What role might academic disciplines play in the formation of cultural and political identities and how might an anthropological perspective with its emphasis on ethnography lend insight to our understanding of Asian America?

This course will examine the dynamics behind group identity, namely ethnicity, by comparing and contrasting the varied experiences 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, relations between diaspora and homeland, and the struggle for cultural citizenship in the Americas.

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 focus 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, Latin America 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 5. 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.”

NO COMPUTERS OR OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES PERMITTED DURING CLASS

Required Texts:

1. Reader: “Asians in the Americas”
2. Ronald Takaki, Strangers from a Different Shore, Boston: Little Brown and Company.
3. Martin Manalansan ed., Ethnographic Explorations of Asian America, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

All readings are available at the Campus Book Store and at the Asian American Studies Resource Center 420 Rockefeller

Syllabus

Aug. 23 **Introduction**

Aug. 28 **Why Asian America through Ethnography?**

1. Manalansan (2000) “Introduction” (2-6).
2. Vo, Linda Trinh, “Performing Ethnography in Asian American Communities” in Manalansan (2000).
3. Kang, Miliann, “Researching One’s Own” in Manalansan (2000).

1. Theories of Ethnicity

Aug. 30 **"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. Okmura (1981) "Situational ethnicity." Ethnic and Racial Studies 4 (3):452-465.

Sep. 6 **Classifying Inequality: Producing Ethnics, Minorities and Races.**

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.

Sep. 11 General Discussion or **Film: Ancestors in the Americas**

2. Asians in the Caribbean

Sep. 13 **Film: Mirrors of the Heart**

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

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

Sep. 20 **East Indians in the Caribbean**

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.

Sep. 25 **Film: Chutney**

Sep. 27 **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. Chang, Jason, (2011) "Racial Alterity in the Mestizo Nation" Journal of Asian American Studies, 14 (3) 331-359.

3. *Asians in the United States*

Locating Asian America through History

Oct. 2 **Chinese in the United States**

Film: Chinese in the Frontier West

- Oct. 4 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 **Fall Break**

Oct. 11 **Japanese and Koreans in the United States**

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

Oct. 16 Guest Speaker

Oct. 18 **South Asians in the United States**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 8]

Oct. 23 **Filipinos in the United States**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 9]

Oct. 25 **World War II and the Asian American Challenge to American Society**

1. Takaki (1989) [Chapter 10]

Oct. 30 General Discussion/Catching Up

Asian American Identity and Heterogeneity

Nov. 1 **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. 6

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.
3. Bonus, Rick (2000) "Of *Palengkes* and Beauty Pageants: Filipino American-Style Politics in Southern California" in Manalansan.
4. Ong, Aihwa (2000) "Making the Biopolitical Subject: Cambodian Immigrants, Refugee Medicine, and Cultural Citizenship in California" in Manalansan.

Nov. 8 **Immigrant/Cosmopolitan/Diaspora**

Film: Miss India Georgia

- Nov. 13
1. Louie, Andrea (2000) "Chineseness across Borders: A Multisited Investigation of Chinese Diaspora Identities" in Manalansan.
 2. Vergara, Benito (2000) "Betrayal, Class Fantasies, and the Filipino Nation in Daly City" in Manalansan.
 3. Maira, Sunaina (1999) "Identity Dub: The Paradoxes of an Indian American Youth Subculture (New York Mix)" in Cultural Anthropology 14 (1): 29-60.

- Nov. 15
1. Leonard, Karen (2000) "Identity in the Diaspora: Surprising Voices" in Manalansan.

2. Schein, Louisa (2000) “Forged Transnationality and Oppositional Cosmopolitanism” in Manalansan.

Nov. 20 Concluding Discussion

Nov. 22 **Thanksgiving Break**

Nov. 27 **Presentations**

Nov. 29 **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)