

Department: AFAM (AFRA)/ ANTH

Course No: 3125 [275]

Credits: 3

Title: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism

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Content Area: CA2 Social Sciences and CA4 Diversity and Multiculturalism

Diversity: CA4 Non-International

Catalog Copy:

275. Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism. Either semester. Three credits. Linnekin. Popular and scholarly theories of human group identity. Examination of the concepts of "race" and "ethnicity" in cross-cultural and historical perspective. Systems of classification in relationship to social inequality. Political mobilizations of communal identity.

Course Information:

a. Students in this course learn how human collective identities are symbolically constructed, politically mobilized, and invoked as the basis of social and economic inequality. Systems of human categorization--academic and popular--are examined comparatively and cross-culturally. Illustrative case studies are drawn from the Islands, Native North America, Europe, and the modern. The format is lecture augmented by discussion, class exercises, occasional videos, and in-class examination of Web site material.

b. The major components of the grade are a mid-term exam, a cumulative final exam, and an annotated bibliography on a relevant topic chosen in consultation with the instructor. Other factors in the grade are completion of class exercises and homework assignments and participation in class discussions. Required reading includes a comprehensive volume on "race," two monographs, a collected volume on identity formation in modern states, and a course packet containing several articles.

c. The primary goal of the course is to teach students the diversity of models of collective identity and thereby to problematize seemingly "common sense" ideas such as "race" and "ethnicity." Students in this class examine the nature of human physical and cultural variation in relation to social categorization systems. Is "race" a scientifically valid concept? How do human groups see themselves and how are their self-perceptions affected by the labels applied by outsiders? Assigned case studies illustrate the effects of colonialism on group definition, historical transformations of communal identities, and struggles of subordinate groups over land and sovereignty.

Meets Goals of Gen Ed: This course fulfills the following goals of General Education, in order of importance: 3, 4 and 6 (primarily); 1, 2, and 5 (secondarily).

1. To demonstrate competence on examinations and written assignments, and to participate adequately in class discussions, students must define and/or compare key concepts. They must be able to explain and compare scholarly and popular theories of collective identity, and critically evaluate their relative validity by reference to course material. Students are also required to describe different cultural systems of group affiliation, explain historical changes in collective categories, and articulate the connections between cultural models of identity and systems of social inequality. The annotated bibliography requires them to produce written exegeses of scholarly sources.

2. This course challenges concepts and assumptions that are part of the received "common sense" of our culture. For example, most university students have no idea that "race" is conceptualized very differently in different parts of the world, or that anthropologists have discredited "race" as a scientific concept. Students in this course learn new ways of thinking about group sameness and distinctiveness, and thereby become more informed and, ideally, empathetic global citizens.

3. Promoting critical thinking about conventional ideas of "race" and "ethnicity" is fundamental to this course. As stated above, students must digest and evaluate theoretical as well as ethnographic material and make informed judgments about issues of identity, tradition, and communal rights. Students are exposed to a counter-intuitive, symbolic constructionist approach, which challenges them to question the popular premise that "race," "ethnicity" and "tradition" are primordial and unchanging.

4. Racial and ethnic hatred is humankind's most ancient and most persistent evil. A primary goal of the course is to teach students to suspend their preconceptions and prejudices and to acquire objective, dispassionate knowledge about the sameness and diversity of human groups.

5. Racial and ethnic conflicts make international news on a daily basis. "Race" particularly is a prominent and persistent issue in our society, continually invoked in discussions of education, economic inequality, family structure, politics, and social problems.

6. As described above, a major course focus is the variety of human models of affiliation and schemes of classification. Through ethnographic examples and readings, students also learn about the experiential consequences of communal oppression.

CA2 Criteria:

1. A central goal of the course is to introduce and examine critically long-standing theories and concepts about the nature of human groups. (Cf. point number 3 in the preceding section.) Topics include the history of "race" as a popular and scientific concept and critical comparison of sociological and cultural constructionist approaches to "ethnicity," "tradition," "authenticity," and other concepts relevant to the study of group identity. Students must be able to discuss and illustrate through example the connections between historical experience, cultural systems of classifying people, and contemporary social inequality.

2. The course examines past and present methodologies that social scientists have employed to formulate statements about human group sameness and diversity. The methodologies foregrounded in this course are historical analysis, population genetics, ethnography, and analysis of symbolic representations. Ethical dilemmas and difficulties abound in this area of study, particularly in the context of social science research that raises issues of primordial identities, ethnic boundaries, tradition, authenticity, identity politics, indigenous rights, and communal claims to land and sovereignty.

3. This course examines identity issues primarily at the level of groups, social structures, and societies. However, individual experiences and struggles are also documented in the assigned readings and videos in order to substantiate statements about collective history and experience. As in other

anthropology courses, students thereby learn how the lives of individuals are affected by historical, cultural, and social structural phenomena beyond their control. A major theme of the course is the interaction between groups struggling for communal rights and nation-state governments.

4. As described above, issues of race, ethnicity, inequality, and political power form the core content of this course. These issues are addressed in depth throughout the course and students are assessed on their competence in discussing the different points of view presented, using case study material to substantiate their responses. Through historical study, exposure to principles of population genetics, cross-cultural comparison, and ethnographic case studies, students acquire conceptual tools for analyzing relationships between social and political entities and for understanding modern social problems.

CA4 Criteria:

1. As stated above, through cross-cultural comparison ANTH 275 exposes students to a number of different models for classifying people into groups. Racial and ethnic categorization is also examined historically, to demonstrate that cultural perceptions and values change over time. Students also learn about the historical and modern communal experiences of racial, ethnic, and indigenous groups.
2. The fundamental thesis of this course is precisely that systems of communal classification, including concepts of "race," "ethnicity" and "tradition," are cultural constructions. Though ideological "creations," they nonetheless have very real effects on social and economic structures.
3. Students in this course learn about cultural diversity, but also about commonalities that derive from shared historical experiences, such as the similar situations of subordinated groups and colonized peoples around the world.
4. The course perspective emphasizes respect for the self-representations of subordinated peoples. Most of the case study material deals with racial and ethnic oppression, the dispossession of native peoples, ethnic stratification, and historic violations of communal human rights. Students learn about disenfranchisement and inequality based on perceived collective identities, and study communal struggles for rights and resources.