Soc 230AB
Comparative Ethnicity and Nationalism
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Winter and spring quarters 2005

This two-quarter sequence is designed especially for students who are considering taking the field examination in Comparative Ethnicity and Nationalism, though other students, from sociology and other departments, are welcome as well. The course seeks to "decenter" prevailing American perspectives on ethnicity, race, and nationhood. In the broader literature, these concepts have wider meanings, and theoretical debates have different contours, than in the US. A comparative view helps to contextualize and relativize the US experience.

The course is based on the assumption that ethnicity, race, and nation belong to a broad family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization, and political contestation, all related to perceived similarities and differences of cultural background, social belonging, and political destiny. "Ethnicity" is the broadest term, including almost all of what we mean by "race" and much (but not all) of what we mean by nationhood and nationalism. "Race" is thus conceptualized as a particular form of ethnicity that emerges when phenotype becomes an important diacritical marker of difference. "Nation" -- insofar as it overlaps with ethnicity -- is taken as a specifically modern form of ethnicity that is understood to be based on common history, culture, and political destiny and to justify claims to an autonomous polity.

The course begins with ethnicity, understood broadly as embracing race and nationhood as well. After an introductory discussion of basic concepts and perspectives, we devote a week to each of five broad approaches, emphasizing (1) political and institutional contexts and configurations; (2) economic competition and closure; (3) cultural construction; (4) rational choice and micro-mechanisms; and (5) psychological processes. In the second section of the course, we devote three weeks to race. In the spring quarter, the first five weeks will be devoted to nationhood and nationalism; the next three or four weeks to cross-cutting themes (eg religion, gender, or conflict and violence) or exemplary works; and the final week or two to an examination of trajectories, diagnoses, and prospects, including questions of a possible movement "beyond" ethnicity, race, or nationalism.