Course Description

In recent years, South Asian Americans have become an increasingly visible presence in American popular culture, as writers and characters on TV shows (The Mindy Project, Big Bang Theory), stand up comics (Aziz Ansari, Hari Kondabolu), and most recently, the winners of Spelling Bees and Miss America pageants. Such narratives have filled a convenient script for the “model minority” myth of the U.S., while troublingly glossing over reports that are far more dissonant with narratives of the American dream. Instances of racism and xenophobia against South Asian enclaves have occurred in the 1980s, while racial profiling and violence against South Asians, particularly Sikhs and Muslims, by state and non-state actors spiked after 9/11.

But for more than a century, South Asians have played a key role in North American history, at the center of legal and historical cases that changed the parameters of race and citizenship in the U.S. and Canada. This course will explore this long history — from the earliest settlers who arrived in late nineteenth century to the effects of the "War on Terror." We will also consider how writers, filmmakers, and other artists have explored the experiences of diaspora and immigration, and the complex racial and gender politics of the U.S., through a series of guiding questions:

- What are the limits and possibilities of the category “South Asian American”?
- How have South Asians fit into and shaped the racial politics of the U.S.?
- What kind of stereotypes have been constructed around South Asian people over the course of American history? How have South Asian Americans responded?
- How have South Asians organized communities in America? How have they been received by and how have they remade American society?
**Course Materials**

The readings for this course will be available by PDF through Ctools. In addition, the following book must be purchased for this course:

- Anand Giridharadas, *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas*

This book can be purchased through an online bookstore (Amazon, Indiebound), and is also available as ebooks (Kindle, Google Ebook). Either version – print or electronic – is fine for use in this class. Please note that we will begin the Giridharadas readings on December 2, so plan accordingly.

**Assignments**

There are several different types of assignments for this course.

1) Short Writing Assignments:

   a. Responses: Roughly every week or so, I will be assigning 500-word responses, which will be due at the beginning of the next class. These assignments are meant for you to engage the current readings, concepts, and a specific prompt. They also provide an opportunity to hone your skills of writing and analysis and receive feedback (and grades) from me on your writing. You might use one of these responses as the kernel of your final paper.

   b. Write-Up of Event: Over the course of the semester, you will be required to attend one event (lecture, film, performance) on or near campus that is relevant to the field of South Asian American studies. (One such event is the screening of *Korla* slated on October 8, and another is the visit from Deepa Iyer to occur on November 19). You will be expected to offer a brief summary of the event in addition to a critical discussion of the event’s relationship to the course readings and discussion. Expected length is approximately 500 words. This assignment can be completed at any point, but must be turned in on or before Friday, December 9.

   c. First Days Assignment: For this assignment, you will be submitting a story for the First Days Project (firstdaysproject.org), an online project that was started by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA; www.saada.org) to record stories and memories of immigrants’ first day in the United States. These stories can be recorded as audio, video, or a written transcript, and will be published online.

   d. *Tides* Article: You will be asked to write a short piece about a historical object of your choosing from SAADA in the style of *Tides* magazine, the archive’s online publication. You also have the option about writing about another historical reference or event, not found in SAADA. This article should be approximately 500 words in length, and provide a broader context and analysis for a historical artifact pertaining to the South Asian diaspora. As with your response papers, this assignment might serve as the beginnings of your final paper.

2) Reading Quizzes: As a way to make sure you’re keeping up with the reading, I will periodically give you short reading quizzes. These will entail short answer responses, and if you have done the reading, these will not be difficult.
3) **Midterm Exam**: There will be an in-class midterm exam, which will feature passage identification and short essays. You will be required to directly engage with the course readings as well as discussions in class. The exam will take place during our class session on October 14.

4) **Final Paper**: Your final assignment for the course will be a research paper pertaining to some aspect about the South Asian diaspora. More details about this assignment will be announced closer to the end of the semester.

**Grades**

- Responses: 15%
- Event Write-Up: 5%
- First Day Project Assignment: 5%
- *Tides* Article: 5%
- Quizzes: 5%
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final Paper: 30%
- Participation: 10%

**Attendance & Participation**

Attendance is mandatory for this course, and an essential part to how the course is designed. The strength of this course will depend on establishing a community of writers, readers, and thinkers who take one another’s work and opinions seriously. In order to do that, you should be fully present, on time, and with all the readings covered.

If you have to miss a class period because of a religious holiday, please let me know in advance and your absence will be excused. Similarly, if you are sick, provide a doctor’s note in order to be excused. If you don’t have official documentation explaining your absence, you will be marked for an unexcused absence. In other words, an email saying you don’t feel well isn’t enough to count as an excused absence.

That said, you are allowed a grand total of **two** unexcused absences over the course of the semester. So, if for whatever reason – you’re not feeling well but it’s not the sort of thing you can go to UHS for – then you can miss that class. By the third unexcused absence, however, your grade will be negatively affected a half a letter grade (a B+ becomes a B, a B becomes a B-, etc.) If an assignment is due and you know that you will be absent, please make arrangements to submit it early. If you have an unexcused absence during a quiz, you will not be able to make this up.

**Plagiarism**

The university’s usual standards for academic integrity will be upheld in this course. If you’re not familiar with them, please read the guidelines regarding plagiarism posted on the LSA website [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/), and ask me if you have any questions or concerns. In short, make sure to quote and cite with footnotes any words or ideas that you include in your paper that you first found elsewhere. Be particularly careful to avoid using material from websites without quotation marks and attribution: just like printed sources, texts from websites must be quoted and cited. It’s better to be safe than sorry – an extra citation or two won’t bother anyone, but neglecting to quote or cite properly will lead to serious consequences for your academic career.
Special Circumstances:

Students with special circumstances (disabilities, athletic schedules, etc.) should speak with me as soon as possible so that proper arrangements can be made. Athletes and those involved with student activities that require travel during our meeting time should provide an official copy of your travel schedules with conflicting times highlighted.

Office Hours

I have scheduled my office hours this term between 4-5 on Monday and Wednesday, immediately after our class. My office is at 3658 Haven Hall. Haven Hall is in the large aggregate of buildings (including Angell Hall, Mason Hall, the “Fishbowl,” etc) on the western edge of the diag. The best way to reach my office is to enter through the doorway facing the diag, and take the elevator to third floor. I’m all the way down the hall. Office hours are a great chance for us to extend a conversation we had in class, to get some feedback on any assignments you’re working on, or even if you want to discuss any other issues regarding the class. If you can’t make that time, please feel free to email me or talk to me after class to schedule another time to meet.

Sweetland Writing Center:

If you would like more help on your essays beyond classroom workshops or conference during office house, consider going to the Sweetland Writing Center. Sweetland is located at 1310 North Quad on State Street, and you can contact them at sweetlandinfo@umich.edu.
Semester Schedule

Our schedule is subject to change, depending on our pace of reading and writing. If there are any changes, I will let you know in class and through Ctools. The readings should be completed on the day scheduled (i.e., if a reading is listed for Sep. 12, then you should complete it by that date). For space purposes, I did not include full citational information for the readings, but I will include that for you for your final papers.

Class #1
Wednesday, September 9
Introductions

Class #2
Monday, September 14
Overview of South Asian American History
- R. Benedito Ferrao, “Pan South Asian Identity”
- Judith Brown, “Making a Modern Diaspora”
- Bennet, Grossberg, and Morris (eds), New Keywords: “Diaspora,” “Ethnicity,” “Identity,” “Multiculturalism,” “Race”

Class #3
Wednesday, September 16
Early Migrants on the West Coast
- Film: Roots in the Sand (1998, Dir. Jaysri Hart)
- Ronald Takaki, “The Tide of the Turbans”
- Karen Leonard, “Punjabi Farmers and California’s Alien Land Law”
- Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, “The Founding of Yuba City”

Class #4
Monday, September 21
Intimacies in New Spaces
- Vivek Bald, Selections from Bengali Harlem
- Nayan Shah, “Intimate Dependency, Race, and Trans-Imperial Migration”

Class #5
Wednesday, September 23
Komagata Maru
- Film: A Continuous Journey (2004, Dir. Ali Kazimi)
- Seema Sohi, “Repressing the ‘Hindu Menace’: Race, Anarchy, and Indian Anticolonialism”

Class #6
Monday, September 28
Students and Revolutionaries
• Maia Ramnath, “Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India’s Radical Diaspora, 1913-1918”
• Saranghadar Das, “Why We Must Emigrate to America?” (1911)
• Selections from Ghadar Party Journals

Class #7
Wednesday, September 30
Orientalism
• Vijay Prashad, “Of the Orientalist Menagerie”
• Gaiutra Bahadur, “Postcards from Empire”
• Vivek Bald, “American Orientalism”
• G. Perinet, “Have We a Dusky Peril?” (1906)

Class #8
Monday, October 5
Self-Orientalism
• Philip Deslippe, “Yoga and the Impeachment of Oklahoma’s Governor”
• Priya Srinivasan, Selection from Sweatimg Saris
• Sant Nihal Sing, “Picturesque Immigrant”

Class #9
Wednesday, October 7
Citizenship Cases
• United States vs. Balsara (1910)
• United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind (1922)
• Ian Haney-Lopez, “Ozawa and Thind”

Thursday, October 8: Film Screening: Korla

Class #10
Monday, October 12
Whiteness and Citizenship
• Review Session

Class #11
Wednesday, October 14
In-Class Midterm Exam

Monday, October 19: Fall Break / No Class

Class #12
Wednesday, October 21
Diaspora and Decolonization
• Judith Brown, “Movement in an Age of Decolonization and Globalization”

Class #13
Monday, October 26
Model Minority
• Editors of n+1, “White Indians”
• Vijay Prashad, “Of the Origin of Desis and Some Principles of State Selection”
• Robert Lee, “Model Minority”

Class #14
Wednesday, October 28
Between Black and White?
• Dark Matter, “Bring in Brown to Keep Black Down”
• Vijay Prashad, “On Antiblack Racism”
• Recommended: Anirvan Chatterjee, “Black and Desi: A Shared History”

Class #15
November 2
Limits and Possibilities of the Category “South Asian”: Part I
• Nazli Kibria, “Bangladeshi American Dreams”
• Durriya Meer, “Bangladeshis in Hamtramck”
• Iftikhar Dadi, “The Pakistani Diaspora in North America”
• Lopita Nath, “A Little of Nepal”

Class #16
November 4
Limits and Possibilities of the Category “South Asian”: Part II
• Naheed Islam, “In the Belly of the Multicultural Beast I am Named South Asian”
• Lavina Dhingra Shankar, “The Limits of (South Asian) Names and Labels”
• The Samar Collective, “One Big, Happy Community: Class Encounters of the South Asian Kind”

Class #17
November 9
Diasporic Politics: Diasporic Fundamentalism
• Christophe Jaffrelot, “The Diaspora and Hindu Nationalism”
• Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, “Deceit of the Right”
• Burton Stein, “Hindu Nationalism”

Class #18
November 11
Political Activism

• Deepa Iyer, “Not Our American Dream” and “Journeys in a Racial State”
• Vijay Prashad, “Of Solidarity and Other Desires”

Class #19
November 16
Politics of Gender and Sexuality

• Prajna Paramita Choudhury, “The Violence That Dares Not Speak Its Name”
• Margaret Abraham, “Addressing Domestic Violence Among South Asians in the US”
• Sandip Roy, “Call of Rice: South Asian American Queer Communities”

Class #20
November 18
Politics of Caste in the Diaspora

• Thenmozhi Soundararajan and Sinthujan Varatharajah, “Caste Privilege 101: A Primer for the Privileged”
• Vijay Prashad, “Afro-Dalits of the World Unite!”

Class #21
November 23
Cultural Politics I

• DJ Rekha, “An Ear to the Streets and a Vibe in the Basement”
• Sunaina Maira, “B-Boys and Bass Girls: Sex, Style, and Mobility in Indian American Youth Culture”
• Siddhartha Mitter, “Tawqacore: Salat, Angst and Rock & Roll”

Wednesday, November 25: Thanksgiving

Class #22
November 30
Cultural Politics II: Cultural Appropriation

• TBA

Class #23
December 2
Racism and Hate Crimes

• Amardeep Singh, “Beyond Recognition and Misrecognition: The Shooting at Oak Creek Gurdwara”
• Sangay Mishra, “Race, Religion, and Political Mobilization: South Asians in the Post-9/11 United States”
• Junaid Rana, “Tracing the Muslim Body: Race, U.S. Deportation, and Pakistani Return Migration”

Class #24
Monday, December 7
South Asian America after 9/11
  • Anand Giridharadas, The True American

Class #25
Wednesday, December 9
South Asian America after 9/11
  • Anand Giridharadas, The True American

Response

Class #26
Monday, December 14
South Asian America after 9/11
  • Anand Giridharadas, The True American

Final Project Due December 18