Prof. Jean Jackson  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ethnic and National Identity

**Brief description:** An introduction to the cross-cultural study of ethnic and national identity. We examine the concept of social identity, and consider the ways in which gendered, linguistic, religious, and ethno-racial identity components interact. We explore the history of nationalism, including the emergence of the idea of the nation-state, as well as ethnic conflict, globalization, identity politics, and human rights.

**Comprehensive description:** This subject looks at the evolution of the concepts of ethnic and national identity over time, in both social science and everyday life. Students are introduced to the substantial cross-cultural variation in how personhood and social identity are conceptualized. We explore the history of notions about what constitutes a “nation,” in the sense of a “people,” looking at what the term meant prior to the European nation-state and imperial projects of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and at what it means in the present era of multiculturalism, postmodernity, globalization, and transnational trends such as migration. We examine how both ethnic and nation-state nationalism create narratives about the past that are intended to help solve present-day problems. We also look at the related concepts of race, religion, gender, and culture, examining how each one entails the others. We also study how ethnic and national identity in the West are seen in terms of shared biological legacies, shared histories, and shared cultural content, conceived in terms of 1) shared patterns of behavior—music, dress, food styles, embodied habits (e.g., posture), etc., and 2) inner qualities such as character, personality, or talent. Language ideologies are also briefly discussed, with an emphasis on how linguistic features (lexicon, phonology) serve non-linguistic purposes, for instance, signaling ethnic or national identity.

**Requirements:** In addition to written work, students are expected to keep up with all assigned readings (approximately 150 pp. a week for the books; 100 pp. a week for articles). Students must attend class and participate; this part of the course, coupled with Reader Responses, will account for 10% of the grade. Students who miss more than 3 classes will lose credit. Students write 3 papers, each counting 30%.

*Weekly Reader Responses:* consist of a few sentences describing your reaction to one of the readings for that session. Do not provide an analysis or summary, give us your *response* to it. These should take no more than 10 minutes to write and post on the class Stellar “Forum” site before class meets either on Tuesday or Thursday. While these are not graded, they are required.

There is no final examination.

*Papers:* you will write three papers, 7 or more pages (roughly 2000 words) each. You must rewrite the first two papers in light of the comments you receive. The revised draft
is the version that will be graded. Rewriting the third paper is optional, but highly recommended.

You will also be expected to participate in class discussions and presentations. If a student does not regularly volunteer, she or he will be randomly called upon to speak. Students will present their third paper in class.

Five videos will be shown.

The first class hour will be lecture, followed by 1/2 hour discussion.

Required Books (available at the Coop):

- Other readings are posted on the class Stellar site

A previous version of this subject is available at:


1. Tues. Feb. 5  Introduction to the study of ethnic and national identity: the stakes, and why the stakes are so high

2. Thurs. Feb. 7  Ethnic identity I

   Read:  Begin Gladney 1-23
   Nagel 3-13

3. Tues. Feb. 12  Ethnic identity II

   Read:  Gladney 25-54 (29)
   Nagel 19-33 (14)


   Read:  Gladney 57-132 (75)

Tuesday Feb. 19 no class (Monday schedule of classes)
5. Thurs. Feb. 21  Nation and nationalism I


6. Tues. Feb. 26  Nation and nationalism II

Video:  The Master Race

Read:  Finish Gladney 135-176 (41)

7. Thurs. Feb. 28  Ethnicity, state, nation


8. Tues. March 4  State, nation, culture


9. Thurs. March 6  Culture: definitions
Nagel, Constructing culture, 43-54; Deconstructing ethnicity, 60-72. (23)

**FIRST DRAFT OF FIRST PAPER DUE**

10. Tues. March 11 Ethnic conflict I

Video: Gacaca


11. Thurs. March 13 Ethnic conflict II


**FIRST PAPER RETURNED, WITH COMMENTS**

12. Tues. March 18 Race I

Read: Wade, Defining race, 1-15, Existing approaches to race, 16-36; Historicising racialised natures, 37-68. (52)

13. Thurs. March 20 Race II
Read: Wade, Genetics and kinship: the interpenetration of nature and culture, 69-96; Race, nature and culture, 97-111; Embodying racialised natures, 112-122. (54)

**REWRITE OF FIRST PAPER DUE**

March 24-28 Spring Vacation

14. Tues. April 1 Race III

Video: Stolen Generations: Genocide and the Aborigines


15. Thurs. April 3 Ethnic identity, nationalism and gender


**FIRST DRAFT OF SECOND PAPER DUE**

16. Tues. April 8 Ethnic identity, state, and sexuality


17. Thurs. April 10 Religion, ethnicity, the nation


SECOND PAPER HANDED BACK, WITH COMMENTS

18. Tues. April 15 Language, culture, ethnicity


19. Thurs. April 17 Culture recovery

Read: Nagel: American Indian population growth: changing patterns of Indian ethnic identification, 83-105; The politics of American Indian
ethnicity: solving the puzzle of Indian ethnic resurgence, 113-141.  
(56)

FINAL DRAFT OF SECOND PAPER DUE

Tues. April 22 no class—Patriots Day

20. Thurs. April 24  Culture: appropriations, heritage, “selling culture”

Video: White Shamans and Plastic Medicine Men

Read: Nagel: Red Power: reforging identity and culture, 158-178; Renewing culture and community, 187-205. (38)

OPTIONAL FIRST DRAFT OF THIRD PAPER DUE

21. Tues. April 29  Human rights, collective rights

Nagel: Reconstructing federal Indian policy: from termination to self-determination, 213-228; The problematics of American Indian ethnicity, 234-248. (29)

22. Thurs. May 1  New Social Movements


OPTIONAL FIRST DRAFT OF THIRD PAPER HANDED BACK WITH COMMENTS
23. Tues. May 6  Transnationalism, globalization and culture


24. Thurs. May 8  Summing up

Video: Genocide: The Ultimate Terrorism


**FINAL DRAFT OF THIRD PAPER DUE**

25. Tues. May 13  Summing up: review of theory


26. Thurs. May 15  Student reports

Video: Without Due Process: Japanese Americans and World War II
No reading for today.