

## \*The South Asian Diaspora in America\*

### Course Description

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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?



Credit: The Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour  
[www.berkeleysouthasian.org](http://www.berkeleysouthasian.org)

## Course Materials

The readings for this course will be available by PDF through Canvas. In addition, three books must be purchased for this course:

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*
- Hirsh Sawhney, *South Haven*
- Tanwi Nandini Islam, *Bright Lines*

These books have been ordered and should be available at Ulrich's and the Union bookstore, as well as other online stores. Please do let me know if you have trouble procuring the books

## Assignments

There are several different types of assignments for this course.

- 1) Short Writing Assignments:
  - a. Responses: Every few weeks, 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.
  - 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 Asian/Pacific Islander American studies or Arab and Muslim American studies. 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 within a week of the event.
  - c. First Days Assignment: For this assignment, you will be submitting a story for the First Days Project ([firstdaysproject.org](http://firstdaysproject.org)), an online project that was started by the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA; [www.saada.org](http://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 as a written transcript, and will be published online. Due on Nov 1.
  - 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. Due on Oct 4.
- 2) Reading Quizzes: As a way to make sure you're keeping up with the reading, I will be giving you weekly quizzes, every Tuesday. These will entail short responses (a word or at times, a sentence), 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 13.
- 4) Take-Home Exam: Your final assignment for the course will be a take-home exam, which will involve a range of short essay questions pertaining to the novels, films, and themes we will be studying in the second half of the course.
- 5) Participation: Regularly participating in the classroom discussion is an important component of your final grade for the course. 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.

### **Grades**

- Participation: 12.5%
- Quizzes: 12.5%
- Midterm Exam: 25%
- Final Take-Home Exam: 25%
- Short Writing Assignments: Total 25%
  - Responses: 5%
  - Write-Up of Event: 5%
  - *Tides* Article: 7.5%
  - First Day Project Assignment: 7.5%

### **Attendance**

Attendance is mandatory for this course, and an essential part to how the course is designed. 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/>), 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 12-2 on Wednesday. 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](mailto:sweetlandinfo@umich.edu).

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## \*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 Canvas. The readings should be completed on the day scheduled (i.e., if a reading is listed for Sep. 13, 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.

### Week #1

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#### Tuesday, September 6 Introductions

#### Thursday, September 8

##### Overview of South Asian American History

- **Guest Speaker: Samip Mallick, Director of the South Asian American Digital Archive (Skype)**
- “An Introduction to South Asian American History” (Saada.org)
- Readings from SAADA
  - G. Perinet, “Have We a Dusky Peril?” (1906)
  - Girindra Mukerji, “The Hindu in America” (1908)
  - Agnes Foster Buchanan, “The West and the Hindu Invasion” (1908)

### Week #2

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#### Tuesday, September 13 Bengali Harlem

- Vivek Bald, Selections from *Bengali Harlem*
- Nayan Shah, “Intimate Dependency, Race, and Trans-Imperial Migration”

#### Thursday, September 15

##### Early Migrants on the West Coast

- In-Class Screening: *Roots in the Sand* (1998, Dir. Jaysri Hart)
- Ronald Takaki, “The Tide of the Turbans”

### Week #3

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#### Tuesday, September 20 Revolution Abroad

- Selections from SAADA (Gadar Pamphlets, India Home Rule League Pamphlets)
- Seema Sohi, “Repressing the ‘Hindu Menace’: Race, Anarchy, and Indian Anticolonialism”
- Maia Ramnath, “Two Revolutions: The Ghadar Movement and India’s Radical Diaspora”

#### Thursday, September 22

##### Komagata Maru

- Film: *A Continuous Journey* (2004, Dir. Ali Kazimi)
- Rajini Srikanth, “The Komagata Maru: Memory and Mobilization”

### Week #4

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**Tuesday, September 27**  
**Imagining the Komagata Maru**

- Sharon Pollock, *The Komagata Maru Incident*

**Thursday, September 29**  
**Orientalism**

- Gaiutra Bahadur, “Postcards from Empire”
- Vivek Bald, “American Orientalism”

**Week #5**

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**Tuesday, October 4**  
**Self-Orientalism**

- Christina Klein, “Introduction” to *Cold War Orientalism*
- In-Class Screening: *Korla* (Dir. John Turner, 2015)
- **Tides Paper Due**

**Thursday, October 6**  
**Citizenship Cases**

- Ian Haney-Lopez, “*Ozawa* and *Thind*”
- United States vs. Balsara (1910)
- United States vs. Bhagat Singh Thind (1922)

**Week #6**

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**Tuesday, October 11**  
**The Road to Citizenship**

- Robert Shaffer, “J.J. Singh and the India League of America, 1945-59”
- Vijay Prashad, “On the Origins of Desis”

**Thursday, October 13**

- **In-Class Midterm Exam**

**Week #7**

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**Tuesday, October 18**

- **Fall Break / No Class**

**Thursday, October 20**

- Nico Slate, “Introduction” to *Colored Cosmopolitanism*
- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*

**Week #8**

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**Tuesday, October 25**

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*

**Thursday, October 27**

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*

#### Week #9

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##### Tuesday, November 1

- W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess*

##### Thursday, November 3

- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

#### Week #10

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##### Thursday, November 8

- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

##### Thursday, November 10

- Jhumpa Lahiri, *The Namesake*

#### Week #11

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##### Tuesday, November 15

- To Be Determined

##### Thursday, November 17

- Hirsh Sawhney, *South Haven*

#### Week #12

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##### Thursday, November 22

- Hirsh Sawhney, *South Haven*

##### Thursday, November 25

- **No Class: Thanksgiving**

#### Week #13

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##### Tuesday, November 29

- Hirsh Sawhney, *South Haven*
- Vijay Prashad, "Of Yankee Hindutva"
- **First Days Project Due**

##### Thursday, December 1

- In-Class Screening: *Meet the Patels* (Dir. Ravi Patel and Geeta Patel)

#### Week #14

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##### Tuesday, December 6

- Tanwi Nandini Islam, *Bright Lines*

**Thursday, December 8**

- Tanwi Nandini Islam, *Bright Lines*

**Week #15**

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**Tuesday, December 13**

- Tanwi Nandini Islam, *Bright Lines*

**Take-Home Final Exam: Due December 18**