Description: Is ethnic identity politics -- the politics of race, language, tribe, caste, religion and region -- good or bad for democratic systems? What are the goals of individuals who mobilize politically on the basis of one or more of these identities? What are the principles that democratic systems should employ in responding to identity-based claims? And how should we evaluate public policies designed to respond to such claims, including affirmative action, federalism, cultural rights, educational policies and electoral systems?

The course addresses these themes using a combination of fiction, mathematical models, autobiography, film, and social science texts. The aim is to train students to think analytically about ethnic identity politics by exposing them to mathematical and social scientific models, while training the intuitions that guide analytical thinking by exposing them to literary texts and to films. The course is organized around a series of analytical questions. We will approach each question first through fiction or autobiography, and then from the perspective of social science theory. Five countries/regions will be used as “reference cases” throughout the course: the U.S., South Africa, South Asia (mainly India, Pakistan and Bangladesh), Turkey and Iraq.

Organization: The course will meet once each week, for a combination of lecture and discussion. I will distribute a list of reading questions meant to guide you through the reading assignments each week and serve as the basis for discussion.

Focus on Writing: The course places strong emphasis on writing. You will be encouraged to write several draft of your papers and to seek feedback from your peers in the process of rewriting.

Requirements: Your grade will depend on three 7 page essays on an assigned topic, class participation, and a final exam. The essays, each of which counts for 20% of your grade, require you to think analytically and in greater depth about the questions raised in class, but not to do new research beyond the assigned materials. Class participation is an important requirement, and counts for 20% of the grade. The final exam will count for the remaining 20%. You are required to attend all class and section meetings, and complete all assigned readings prior to class.

Week One: Introduction.

Week Two: What is Ethnic Identity?

* Sherman Alexie, “The Search Engine” from Ten Little Indians


Week Three: How and Why do Ethnic Identities Change?

* John Howard Griffin, Black Like Me.

Week Four: How and Why do Ethnic Identities Change?

Kanchan Chandra, ed., Ethnicity, Politics and Economics, Chapters 1-3.

* Mary Waters, Black Identities, Harvard University Press, 1999. (Selections)
First Essay Due in Class: Trace the evolution of the ethnic identities of a single individual, chosen from among the readings assigned for class, addressing the following questions. What do you mean by ethnic identity? What is the ethnic identity that this individual initially treated as salient? Did it remain stable or change, and if so why? What are the prospects for stability and change in the future? What are this individual’s “non-ethnic” identity options? Did s/he utilize them? Can s/he be expected to utilize them in the future? Why or why not?

Week Five: Why might individuals mobilize politically on an ethnic basis? What are the alternatives?


Week Six: Why might individuals mobilize politically on an ethnic basis? What are the alternatives?

* Donald Horowitz, Ethnic Groups in Conflict (Selections)

Week Seven: How Does Ethnic Mobilization Interact With Democratic Politics?

* Amitav Ghosh, Shadow Lines

Week Eight: How Does Ethnic Mobilization Interact With Democratic Politics?

Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth Shepsle, Politics in Plural Societies (Selections)

Second Essay Due in Class: Would type of group mobilization is most beneficial for individuals and for democratic systems? Compare the effects of ethnic mobilization with mobilizations on the basis of other types of group identities.

Week Nine: Is assimilation a desirable and/or feasible response to ethnic mobilization?

* Orhan Pamuk, Snow.

Week Ten: Is assimilation a desirable and/or feasible response to ethnic mobilization?

* Brian Barry, Culture and Equality, Selections.

Week Eleven: What kinds of institutions are appropriate for multi-ethnic democracies? Is democracy itself appropriate?

* J. M. Coetzee, Disgrace

Week Twelve: What kinds of institutions are appropriate for multi-ethnic democracies? Is democracy itself appropriate?

* Arend Lijphart, Democracy in Plural Societies, Selections.

Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, Selections.

Third Essay Due in Class: Imagine that you are an “institutional engineer” charged with designing institutions for post-war Iraq. Write an essay describing the institutions you would propose and why. Make sure in your essay to propose an argument for why the institutional design you propose is better than the plausible alternatives.