
Comparative Ethnicity and Nationalism

Rogers Brubaker

230AB is a two-quarter sequence designed especially for students who are considering taking the field examination in Comparative Ethnicity and Nationalism. Space permitting, students from other departments with a serious interest in the material can be admitted with consent of the instructor; those interested should email the instructor describing their background and their reasons for wishing to take the course.

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 place the US experience in a broader context.

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 introductory discussions of basic concepts and empirical configurations, we devote a week to each of five broad approaches, emphasizing (1) the process of political modernization and state-building; (2) economic competition, social closure, and uneven development; (3) the cultural construction of boundaries, categories, and identities; (4) rational choice and micro-mechanisms; and (5) sociobiological, primordialist, and psychological accounts. In the second section of the course, we devote two 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 (e.g. 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.
This is a reading course, not a research seminar. No research, or research paper, is required. The course pivots on the critical examination of key writings in the field. This requires (1) close, critical reading of the literature assigned each week; (2) active participation in class discussion; (3) initiation of discussion, in the form of short (5-10 minute), clearly-focused presentations of key analytical issues by two (or in some cases three) students each week; and (4) preparation each week, after the first week, by all students (with one grace week allowed), of a short memorandum (one or two typed pages) developing, criticizing, or otherwise engaging an analytical issue, question, or problem raised by the reading. (This should not be a summary of the reading, but a response to the reading.)

The weekly memorandum is intended to inculcate the habit of writing as a natural accompaniment to all reflective reading. The memoranda will not be graded; but their submission is a firm requirement of the course.

The memoranda will be posted to an Annotation Board on the class web site. Using software developed by Mike Franks, members of the class will be able not only to read but to annotate one another's memoranda by adding footnotes with comments or questions keyed to particular passages in a memorandum.

So as to allow students and the instructors ample time to read the memoranda before class, the memoranda are to be posted to the web site by midnight Tuesday at the latest. Students will be expected to read each other's memoranda before class, and will be encouraged to annotate them. In this way participants can develop web-based discussions that parallel the classroom discussions.

Initiators of discussion should not, if possible, read a written text, and should not summarize the readings; rather, they should bring into focus the key analytical issues raised in the readings and pose analytical questions about or (if they wish) analytical criticisms of the readings.

At the end of the quarter, there will be a take-home final examination. The questions will be distributed at the last meeting of the class; the examination will be due in the Sociology Department office one week later.

Required readings are listed below by week. [subject to change]

January 11

Introduction

January 18 : Definitions and perspectives
Comparative Ethnicity and Nationalism


Brubaker, Rogers. "Ethnicity without Groups"

January 25: Contexts and configurations


February 1: Macro-political institutionalism

Breuilly, Nationalism and the State, Conclusion


Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, Chapter 2

**February 8:** Competition and closure (cultural division of labor; labor market competition; middleman minorities)


**February 15:** Constructivism (boundary making; situationalism; political discourse; invention of tradition; cognitive approaches; racialization)


*Rational choice (tipping point and cascade models; transaction cost argument; statistical discrimination)*


**March 1**

**Limits to construction and competition (natural nepotism; primordialism; psychological roots; habitus and routinization; insights from genetics)**


Brodwin, Paul "Genetics, Identity, and the Anthropology of Essentialism."

**March 8**

**Race: Analytical approaches**


Loveman, Mara. 1999: "Is 'Race' Essential?" American Sociological Review 64(6):891-98; and Bonilla-Silva reply

March 15

Comparative perspectives on race


