This class surveys a century of migration from the Indian subcontinent to the United States. Two questions will guide our readings and discussion: First, what does it mean to identify as “South Asian?” Second, how do these new ethnic identities expand our understanding of Asian America?

Since this is an interdisciplinary class, we will read a variety of social texts: popular fiction, historiography, ethnography, as well as documentary and feature films. Each of these texts contributes a different perspective on what it means to be a racial and ethnic minority in the U.S. What links these texts together is the technique of close reading, which enables us to understand the lived and representational experience of South Asians in America. We will explore through historical and ethnographic documents how South Asian Americans create and inhabit new forms of cultural identity and national citizenship. At the same time, we will see how changing discourses of multiculturalism restrict and constrain the formation of new ethnicities. Throughout our readings, we will explore how ethnicity is shaped by differences of gender, religion, sexuality and class.

Required Texts:
Mannur and Braziel, Theorizing Diaspora
Monisha Das Gupta, Unruly Immigrants
Jhumpa Lahiri, The Namesake
Karen Leonard, Making Ethnic Choices
Biju Mathew and Vijay Prashad, eds. Amerasia Journal special issue
Vijay Prashad, The Karma of Brown Folk
Sharmila Rudrappa, Ethnic Routes to Becoming American
Shalini Shankar, Desi Land
Nitasha Sharma, Hip Hop Desis

All of these books are available on reserve at McCabe Library, and several are available as E-books. Readings listed () are available on Blackboard under “Course Documents.”

All required films are also on reserve in McCabe Library. You are welcome to watch the films at any time prior to class.