

Ethnic Group Politics

Mr. Ross
Bryn Mawr
Fall 1995

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to consider the politics of ethnicity and race first in the United States and then in a comparative context. To what extent are models of ethnicity and ethnic relations developed in our society helpful for understanding the phenomenon more generally? Given the large number of conflicts both within and between states which are defined in terms of ethnicity and race it is important to understand how ethnicity serves as a basis of identification and political action. What are the sources of ethnic and racial identification and how and when are they politically mobilized? What are the prospects for the constructive management of ethnically rooted conflicts?

The first part of the semester will explore the nature of ethnicity and ethnic group identity. Next we examine the concepts of ethnicity and race in the United States through the different experiences of European-Americans, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans. A critical question is the extent to which the frameworks social scientists have developed for understanding the role of ethnicity and politics through the analysis of European immigrant groups are equally relevant when considering African-American and Asian-Americans. Are there additional concepts which are needed? If so, what are they? What are the political consequences of the different models of ethnicity and ethnic relations we hold? One way we will address these questions is through a detailed consideration of relations between immigrant groups in Philadelphia in recent years.

The second half of the course looks at ethnic politics comparatively and asks how concepts built from the American experience are or are not helpful in other contexts. First, we examine the former USSR and eastern Europe where ethnic tensions and overt conflict, to the surprise of many, has come to the fore in recent years. To what extent is it important that in this part of the world groups are associated with particular national territories in contrast to the U.S. where there has been far greater ethnic assimilation and structural integration into a common culture? What does a concept like national self-determination mean in this region and why is it problematic?

The final two cases we examine are Northern Ireland and South Africa. Once among the most intransigent conflicts both of these have evolved greatly in recent years. In the case of Northern Ireland, there has been a cease fire in place since the fall of 1994 but little progress in direct negotiations while South Africa since 1990 has seen the end of apartheid and the peaceful movement towards the majority-rule government. Why were these conflicts so intransigent in the first place? Why are the steps towards constructive conflict management so hard to take? The final topic of the semester is the question of successful management of ethnic conflicts and considers strategies which might be fruitfully used.

Course Schedule

I. Introduction

Week 1-2: Sept.7-14: Introduction: What is Ethnicity? What is an Ethnic Group? What is Ethnic Politics About?

1. Donald Horowitz. "A Family Resemblance," in *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Ch. 2, pp. 55-92
2. Walker Connor. "A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group is a..." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1 (1978), pg.377-400
3. Susanne Hoeber Rudolph and Lloyd I. Rudolph, "Modern Hate: How Ancient Animositities Get Invented." *The New Republic*, march 22, 1993 pg. 24-29.

What is an ethnic group? How do we know one when we see one? What are the key elements in the concept of ethnicity that are useful in comparative study? What is the connection between biological relatedness and the cultural and political definition of kinship as it motivates ethnic definition and political action? Consider how ethnic group identity organized interpretations of the social and political world? Finally, how is ethnicity a cultural "invention" manipulated for political purposes at times?

II. American Ethnicity

Week 3: Sept. 21: The experience of European Immigrants and Social Theory

1. Milton Gordon. "Assimilation in America: Theory and Reality," *Daedalus* 1961, 263-285
2. Michael Parenti. "Ethnic Politics and the Persistence of Ethnic Identifications" in Hawkins and Lorinskas(ed), *The Ethnic Factor in American Politics* and Baily and Katz (ed), *Ethnic Groups Politics*, and *The American Political Science Review*, 1967.
3. Richard D. Alba. *Ethnic Identity: The Transformation of White Americans*, CH. 1 and 8, pg 1-30, 290-319.
4. Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2, 1979, 1-20.

How do social scientists understand the American ethnic experience? Make sure you understand the critical concepts of structural assimilation, cultural assimilation, accommodation, absence, and strength? What about social and political institutions to serve the interests of ethnic groups and individuals: how are they explained? One view argues that different perspectives (e.g. the melting pot vs. cultural pluralism) offer partially accurate descriptions of ethnic relations in the U.S., but what is needed is a clearer sense of the situations where it is relevant. How would you begin to answer such a question? How have ethnic relations in the US changed over time? What are the political consequences of theorizing about the European immigrant experience.

Weeks 9-10: Nov. 2-9: Northern Ireland: Ethnic Polarization

1. Sabine Wichert, *Northern Ireland Since 1945*. Longman
2. Kevin Boyle and Tom Hadden, *Northern Ireland: the Choice*. Penguin
3. Robert Mulvihill, Marc Howard Ross, and Victor L Schermer, "Psychocultural Interpretations of ethnic Conflict in Northern Ireland: Family and Group Systems Contributions," in Mark Etnin et al (eds), *Group Development and Political Evolution*. pg. 255-278.
4. Mari Fitzduff, "move Sideways to Peace? Mediation Choices in Northern Ireland"

How would you "explain" the conflict in Northern Ireland? What are the specific ways in which Protestants in Northern Ireland came to and held political power? How did Catholic action (and inaction) contribute to the stalemate? How is this analysis consistent with the slow changes in Ulster since 1974? Is the conflict about religious differences? If so, how can you explain the fact that Catholics and Protestants are able to live together peacefully in other parts of the world? If not, what is it about? How do the Mulvihill et al and Fitzduff articles suggest that group identity concerns can be incorporated into possible solutions to the conflict? What are the options which the people in the region might consider? Do Boyle and Hadden capture these choices effectively?

Week 11-12: Nov. 16-30: South Africa: Dismantling Apartheid

1. Milton Esman, "South Africa," in *Ethnic Conflict*. Cornell University Press, pg. 75-110.
2. Peter Gastrow, *Bargaining for Peace: South Africa and the National Peace Accord*. USIP Press

For many years to many South Africa looked like a violent revolution ready to happen as Esman's background chapter suggests. Yet, despite such dire prediction and the total nonrecognition of black rights by the Nationalist Party and government, in 1990 the country changed course and in four years there was a rapid transition to majority rule that few would have thought possible a few years before. How did the National Peace accords help in the rapid transition? Consider what were some of the reasons behind the creation of the apartheid state in the first place, and second what made it possible for the rapid transition to occur.