

History & Literature Oral Exam Materials

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“South Asian Diasporic Experiences in Global Arts & Performance.”

My coursework in Modern Studies began with the earnest intention to study the music, theater, poetry and dance of diasporic South Asian Americans. I wanted to academically study Desi¹ artists and their crafts because I sincerely believed that by engaging academically with them, I would be preparing myself to one day join their leagues as a Desi artist myself. So, my program to the department was a proposal that pivoted my own reflections, doubts, and confusions about Desis: the artistic traditions of South Asian Americans, the challenges that Desis have overcome being racialized “others” in the U.S. and how the South Asian American canon has challenged and complicated understandings of race and ethnicity in America. Through my academic study, I wanted to come to know myself.

Learning about the diaspora necessitated that I first learn about the homeland of South Asia. I grappled with the competing histories within South Asia, the differing flavors of nationalism in Pakistan from the patriotism in India which contradicted once again from the public imagination of Bangladesh, all three countries which faced the legacies of British colonialism and violence. I mapped the parallels between historical accounts and stories and observed how the “true” tales of empires often mirrored the rise and fall of great South Asian performative traditions. As the only officially enrolled student in MUSIC 30: “Music, Dance, and Theatre of South Asia,” I dived deeper into the variations that existed among performative traditions across the South Asian region. My field of research began to narrow as I took Urdu/Hindi language courses and focused more on the artistic traditions found in the Urdu-speaking parts of Pakistan and the Hindi-speaking parts of India.

As I furthered my knowledge of South Asian history and artistic legacies, I attempted to shift my gaze to American Desis and I found that I had to pause. The presence of South Asian people in America is a conversation that exists in relation to and contextualized by the histories of various communities of color in the U.S. specifically that of Black and African American individuals. Desi and Black interactions have come to be an organic part of American history. These interactions have manifested in numerous ways: Desis have been politically active alongside Black Americans, Desis have studied the mechanisms of protest by African American individuals and used these tactics as a blueprint for civic engagement themselves, and there has been an exchange of South Asian and African American musical production over the decades. While these interactions have certainly had moments of positive collaboration, they have also been underscored by the particular racialization of South Asians in close proximity to whiteness and thus white privilege, one example being the pervasive myth of the “model minority.” Furthermore, South Asians have also engaged in anti-Black racism, appropriation of African American artistic traditions, and have racially distanced ourselves from African American individuals to gain leverage in white spaces of power.

The fractured relationships of Desis to our homelands and our politically nuanced relationships with Black Americans have situated Desi claims to power in America. Desi art can engage in systems of oppression and racism when produced without calibrating for the privileges that accompany an articulation of Desiness in adjacency to whiteness. While I have still not found my artist self fully, my coursework has launched me into rigorous academic discussions that have provided me a stronger theoretical, historical, and artistic framework to produce art that is cognizant of the potential for power, privilege, and protest by the Desi American.

¹ Desi means “of the country” and is a Hindi/Urdu term. It is used to denote a diasporic South Asian person or an item that traces its history to South Asia.

COURSE WORK AND DESCRIPTIONS

FRSEMR 37y Muslim Voices, Contemporary Literature

- Read a wide range of Muslim literature from various geographic regions and tried to understand the cultural and political influences that came together in the novels and short stories we read.

AAAS 137 Literature, Oratory, and Pop Music, Politics of Liberation

- Focusing on Black performance, we read novels and plays, listened to music, and engaged with speeches by Black artists and political leaders. The main objective was to understand how the arts were used as a tool to fight for and understand Black liberation.

GOV 40 International Conflict and Cooperation

- This course aimed to understand what political influences impact the decisions taken by a government and political institutions in global governance.

ENG CKR Introduction to Playwriting: Workshop

- Students in this course read plays that varied stylistically and in terms of content to better aid them in their personal journeys to write an original play by the end of the semester.

TDM 105 Introduction to Dramaturgy

- This course focused on adaptation and we traced how theatrical works undergo changes both over time and geography. We engaged in detail with productions at the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.).

TDM 191 Devising Physical Theater and Image Performance

- Taught by the Visiting Director for the Theater, Dance & Media Department, Daniel Kramer. This course demonstrated how physicality on stage aids in the narration of a story and students performed an original piece at the end of the semester inspired by an opera they were assigned.

HIND-URD 102b Intermediate Hindi-Urdu

- Hindi-Urdu language course meant for students who already have a basic understanding of the languages.

HIST-LIT 97 History & Literature Sophomore Tutorial: Utopias and Dystopias in U.S. and the World

- This course engaged with films, novels, and personal accounts to understand how utopias and dystopias are presented and the shortcomings of these visions.

REL 1816 Ismaili History and Thought

- Students surveyed the major philosophical and theological developments in the Ismaili faith.

TDM 97 Theater, Dance & Media Sophomore Tutorial: Drama, Theater, Theory

- This course intended to give sophomores in the Theater, Dance & Media Department an introduction to academic discourse as it relates to the performance art and technology.

GOV 1510 American Constitutional Law

- A survey into key moments of jurisprudence in American law, particularly in relation to key Supreme Court cases.

AAAS 132z Vision and Justice

- A course that gave students visual literacy to understand how art, photography especially, has been a tool to both weaponize but also humanize marginalized voices in America, especially African American individuals.

HIND-URD 104 Classical Urdu Ghazal

- A survey of Urdu Ghazals done chronologically with a focus on repeated themes and the slight variations in structure by Urdu Ghazal poets.

HIST-LIT 98 History & Literature: Junior Tutorial

- This junior tutorial combined academia with performance arts and investigated the effectiveness of art to subvert harmful ideologies. This class ended with a joint creative and academic project in the end of the Fall semester and the Junior Paper in the end of the Spring semester.

MUSIC 30 Music, Theater, and Dance of South Asia

- This class was a survey of South Asian traditions in music, theater, and dance. Students met with a Kutiyattam troupe and partook in a workshop with the troupe as well at the end of the semester.

TDM 90ar Fall Production Studio for *The Owl Answers* by Adrienne Kennedy, the 2017 Fall TDM Production

- The accompanying class with TDM's Fall 2017 show *The Owl Answers* where I was involved as an Assistant Producer.

AAAS 142 Hiphop and Don't Stop

- A course taught in the Hiphop Archive that gave a background of Hiphop history and discourse surrounding Black performance, femininity, power and politics.

HAA 271k Picturing America: Photography, Race, Citizenship

- A seminar that focused on photography as a tool to rectify and amplify the voices of Black Americans as well as Native Americans, LatinX Americans, and Asian Americans.

AAAS 145x The Hiphop Cipher

- Taught by Prof. Marcyliena Morgan and Visiting Artist Fellow, 9th Wonder, this class gave students an understanding on how samples are the musical foundation of hiphop music and how sampling has changed over the decades.

HIND-URD 123 Bollywood and Beyond

- A survey of Hindi films that helped students understand what the Bollywood film industry is and how nationalism, feminism, and politics are articulated in popular Hindi films.

HIST-LIT 99 History & Literature Senior Tutorial

- The goal of this tutorial was to complete my senior thesis.

AAAS 100y Introduction to Black Poetry

- This course gives a chronological survey of African American and Black poets starting from Phillis Wheatley continuing on to present day.

Topic I: Community and Congregation through South Asian Arts

Primary:

Khusro, Amir. *Chaap Tilak*. 13th century.

Pir Hasan Kabiruddin. *Anant Akhado*. 15th century.

Ruswa, Mirza Hadi. *Umrao Jaan*. 1899.

Brook, Peter. *The Mahabharata*. 1985.

Khan, Salman. "Celebration of mulaqat usa jamat Saturday March 1 2018."
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_jUvgottOZg)

Secondary:

Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. 2005.

Wolf, Richard. "The Poetics of "Sufi" Practice: Drumming, Dancing, and Complex Agency at Madho Lāl Husain (And Beyond)." 2006.

Aziz Esmail. *A Scent of Sandalwood: Indo-Ismaili Religious Lyrics*. 2014.

Topic II: The Power of Sight: Black Political Liberation in the United States of America through Visual Imaginings

Primary:

Wheatley, Phillis. "To the University of Cambridge in New England." 1773.

Truth, Sojourner. Carte-de-visite, 1864.

Grimké, Angelina Weld . *Rachel*. 1920.

Weems, Carrie Mae. *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. 1995.

Beyoncé. *Lemonade*. 2016.

Secondary:

Cobb, Jasmine Nichole. "A Particularly 'Oracular' Institution," in *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century*. 2015.

Tremblay, Maxwell, and Stephen Duncombe. *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*. 2011.

Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*. 2014.

Topic III: Racialized “Others”: South Asian-Black Solidarity

Primary:

Sidi Saiyyad Mosque. Ahmedabad, India. 1573.

Gandhi, Mahatma. Open Letter to Natal. December 18, 1894.

“Special Detachment: No. 1- Camp Lewis, Washington.” Image of Bhagat Singh Thind. November 18, 1918.

“Letter from B.R. Ambedkar to W.E.B. DuBois.” 1946.

Dalit Panthers Manifesto in Bombay. 1973.

Asghar, Fatima and Sam Bailey. *Brown Girls*. 2017.

Secondary:

Prashad, Vijay. *The Karma of Brown Folk*. 2000.

Obeng, J. Pashington. *Shaping Membership, Defining Nation: The Cultural Politics of African Indians in South Asia*. 2007.

Topic IV: Religion and Performance: Protest as a Holy Expression

Primary:

Bharata Muni. *Nāṭyaśāstra*. 200 BCE- 200 CE.

Recitation of Prayer by Bilal Ibn Rabah. 6th-7th century.

Kamal-ol-molk. Painted *Tekyeh Dowlat*. 1892.

Butler, Octavia E. *Parable of the Sower*. 1993.

KRS ONE. *The Gospel of Hiphop: First Instrument*. 2009.

Secondary:

Pinn, Anthony B., ed. *Noise and Spirit: The Religious and Spiritual Sensibilities of Rap Music*. 2003.

Dabashi, Hamid. *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*. 2010.

Edwards, Kirstent. "Christianity as Anti-Colonial Resistance?" 2013.

**Topic V: What to do about the British?:
South Asians and the Legacies of the Colonizer, 1900s**

Primary:

Letters written to and from Srinivasa Ramanujan. 1887-1920.

Azimabadi, Bismil. *Sarfaroshi ki Tamanna*. 1921.

Sher-Gil, Amrita. *Painting of Mother India*. 1935.

Begum Akhtar. 1960s. "Tabiat in dinon begana-e-gham hoti jati hai." Written by Jigar Moradabadi (1890-1960). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W65A2OgG8c0>)

Rushdie, Salman. *The Satanic Verses*. 1988.

Gowariker, Ashutosh, dir. *Lagaan*. 2001.

Secondary:

Lahiri, Shompa. *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930*. 2000.

Chakravarty, Sumita. "Woman and the burden of Postcoloniality: The Courtesan Film Genre" in *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*. 1993.

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- Plato. 385 BCE. *Plato, the Symposium*.
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- Wheatley, Phillis. 1773. "On Being Brought from Africa to America."
- Boucicault, Dion. 1859. *The Octoroon*.
- Craft, William and Ellen Craft. 1860. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*
- Douglass, Frederick. 1861. *Lecture on Pictures*.
- Singleton, Benjamin. April 17, 1880. "Testimony of Benjamin Singleton."
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- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. 1913. *We Wear the Mask*.
- Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, and Denise D. Knight. 1915. *The Yellow Wall-paper, Herland, and Selected Writings*.
- Griffith, D.W., dir. 1915. *The Birth of a Nation*.
- Zitkala-Ša. 1921. *American Indian Stories*.
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- Rice, Elmer. 1923. *The Adding Machine: A Play in Seven Scenes*.
- Toomer, Jean. 1923. *Cane*.
- Cullen, Countee. 1925. *Heritage*.
- Locke, Alain. 1925. "The New Negro,"
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 1926. "Criteria of Negro Art"
- Hughes, Langston. 1926. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,"
- O'Casey, Sean. 1926. *The Plough and the Stars: A Tragedy in Four Acts*.
- Johnson, Helene. 1927. *Sonnet to a Negro in Harlem*.
- Locke, Alain. 1928. "Art or Propaganda?"
- Stein, Gertrude, and Virgil Garnett Thomson. 1928. *Four Saints in Three Acts*.
- Chaplin, Charlie, Paulette. Goddard, MK2 Productions, and Warner Home Video. 1936. *Modern Times*.
- Artaud, Antonin, and Corti, Victor. 1938. *The Theatre and Its Double*.
- Kea, Salaria. 1938. "A Negro Nurse in Republican Spain."
- Césaire, Aimé. 1939. *The original 1939 Notebook of a return to the Native Land*.
- Chughtai, Ismat. 1942. *The Quilt*.
- Orwell, George. 1947 *Politics and the English Language: An Essay*.
- Iqbal, Muhammad. 1948. *The Complaint and The Answer; Being Shikwah & Jawab-i-shikwah Done into English Verse*
- Ellison, Ralph. 1952. *Invisible Man*.
- Williams, Tennessee, and New Directions Publishing, Publisher. 1953 *Camino Real*.
- Baldwin, James. 1955. "Stranger in the Village" in *Notes of a Native Son*.
- Esslin, Martin. 1961. *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

Wise, Robert, Ernest Lehman, Jerome. 1961. *West Side Story*.

Albee, Edward. 1962. *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?: A Play*.

Baldwin, James. 1963. *The Fire Next Time*.

Baraka, Amiri. 1963. *Blues People: Negro Music in White America*.

Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*.

Kennedy, John F. October 26, 1963. "Power and Poetry."

Baldwin, James and Richard Avedon. 1964. *Nothing Personal*.

Baraka, Amiri. 1964. *Dutchman; And, The Slave: Two Plays*.

Kennedy, Adrienne. 1965. *The Owl Answers*.

Rao, A. Bhaskar, dir. 1966. *Music of India*.

Peterson, Richard. April 14, 1967. "Hippies Are The Most Radical Dissenter."

Walcott, Derek Alton. 1967. *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.

Brook, Peter. 1968. *The Empty Space*.

Fleischman, Stephen, dir. 1968. *Aretha Franklin: Soul Singer*.

King, Jr., Dr. Martin Luther. April 3, 1968. "I've Been to the Mountaintop."

Haggard, Merle. 1969. "Okie from Muskogee."

Bernstein, Leonard, Stephen. Sondheim, Jerome. Robbins, and Arthur. Laurents. 1972. *West Side Story: A Musical*.

Levin, Ira. 1972. *The Stepford Wives*.

Soyinka, Wole. 1972. *Madmen and Specialists*.

Haqqi, Yahya. 1973. "The saint's lamp."

Jodorowsky, Alejandro, dir. 1973. *Holy Mountain*.

Morrison, Toni. 1977. *Song of Solomon*.

Soyinka, Wole, and Euripides. 1973. *The Bacchae of Euripides: A Communion Rite*.

Combahee River Collective. April 1977. "The Combahee River Collective Statement."

Churchill, Caryl. 1979. *Cloud 9*.

Rushdie, Salman. 1981 "The Prophet's Hair."

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Atwood, Margaret. 1985. *The Handmaid's Tale*.

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Yorke, Michael. 1991. *Eunuchs: India's Third Gender*.

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Hughes, Langston. 1995. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*.

Kane, Sarah. 1996. *Blasted; &, Phaedra's Love*.

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Sippy, Ramesh. 1998. *Sholay*.

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Parks, Suzan-Lori. 2001. *Topdog/underdog*.

Varma, Ram Gopal, Ajay. Devgan, Vivek Oberoi, Manisha. Koirala, Varma Corporation, and Eros International. 2002. *Company: Kampanī*.

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Orvell, Miles. 2003. *American Photography*.

Satrapī, Marjane. 2003. *Persepolis*.

Spooner, James. 2003. *Afro-Punk*.

Ali, Samina. 2004. *Madras on Rainy Days*.

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Ballal, Kishori., Jāvīd Aḳḩtar, Ashutosh. 2004. *Swades: we, the People*.

Marre, Jeremy, dir. 2004. *James Brown: Soul Survivor*.

Mehta, Suketu. *Maximum City 2004: Bombay Lost and Found*.

von Trier, Lars. 2004. *Dogville*.

Willmott, Kevin, dir. 2004. *C.S.A.: Confederate States of America*.

Ali, Muzaffar. 2005. *Umrao Jaan :Umarāva Jāna*.

Bagchi, Rokeya, and Bagchi, Barnita. 2005. *Sultana's Dream; and Padmarag : Two Feminist Utopias*.

Walsh, Aisling. 2005. *Fingersmith*.

Mesenhöller, Peter. 2005. *August F. Sherman: Ellis Island Portraits*,

Lange, Dorothea., Linda. Gordon, and Gary Y. Okihiro. 2006. *Impounded: Dorothea Lange and the Censored Images of Japanese American Internment*.

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Cuarón, Alfonso. 2007. *Children of Men*.

Hamid, Mohsin. 2007. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

Walcott, Derek., and Edward. Baugh. 2007. *Selected Poems*.

Kourouma, Ahmadou., and Adrian Adams. 2008. *The Suns of Independence*.

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Hsu, Hua. January/ February 2009. "The End of White America."

Lee, Young Jean. 2009. *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven and Other Plays*.

Majeed, Omar, dir. 2009. *Taqwacore: The Birth of Punk Islam*.

Rahman, A. R. 2010. *Roja*.

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Roberson, Ed. 2010. *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*.

Jay-Z. 2011. *Decoded*.

Rees, Dee, dir. 2011. *Pariah*.

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McKibben, Bill. July 19, 2012. "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math."

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Harris, Thomas Allen. 2014. *Through a Lens Darkly: Black Photographers and the Emergence of a People*.

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Raymond, Adam K. 2014. "Why did Islam Disappear From Hip-Hop?"

Garland, Alex. 2015. *Ex Machina*.

Gates, Theaster. 2015. "Interview 007: Carol Becker in conversation with Theaster Gates"

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Cuġhtā'ī, 'Iṣmat, and Zāhīr, Nūr. 2016. *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan = The Paper Attire*.

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Koroma, Salima. 2016. *Bad Rap*.

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St. Félix, Doreen. 2017. "The 'Radical Edits' of Alexandra Bell."

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