

AMERICAN CULTURAL PLURALISM AND LAW

Pluralism plu·ral·ism Pronunciation: 'plur-&-"li-z&m
Function: noun Date: 1818

A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization; a concept, doctrine, or policy advocating this state.

Law Pronunciation: 'lo
Function: noun Etymology: Middle English, from Old English lagu, of Scandinavian origin; akin to Old Norse log law; akin to Old English licgan to lie

A binding custom or practice of a community: a rule of conduct or action prescribed or formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority. Law implies imposition by a sovereign authority and the obligation of obedience on the part of all subject to that authority.

Culture cul·ture Pronunciation: 'k&l-ch&r
Function: noun Date: 15th century
Etymology: Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin cultura, from cultus, past participle
The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.

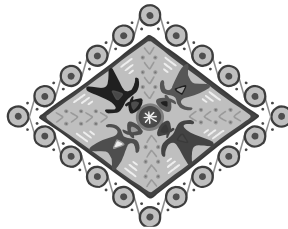
Justice jus·tice pronunciation: 'j&s-t&s
Function: noun Etymology: Middle English, from Old English & Old French; Old English justice, from Old French justice, from Latin justitia, from Justus
The establishment or determination of rights according to the rules of law or equity.

This course is designed to examine the struggles of diverse groups in the U.S. for legal rights and cultural citizenship through legal action. Racial, ethnic, indigenous, and religious groups, women, sexual minorities, and others have organized to draw attention to injustice and/or to demand recognition and change on the basis of their differences. From an anthropological perspective, we will explore social, political and ethical issues that arise in a society that prides itself on cultural diversity on one hand and its commitment to blind justice on the other. We will explore the contradictions that result from this tension which is also situated in a broader context of structural inequality.

This course has the following goals: to critically examine issues of cultural difference, structural inequality, the role of law contesting and enforcing dominant structures, improve research skills and advance writing abilities.



LAW



PLURALISM



JUSTICE

WHAT MAKES YOU SO DIFFERENT?

KEY CONCEPTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY & DIVERSITY, PLURALISM AND IDENTITY

During the first six weeks of the course, we will discover the ways in which the social science field of anthropology and the perspective it offers informs our understanding of diversity and pluralism, including the idea and practice of race, ethnicity and gender in America. We will also study the ways in which identities are shaped by social and cultural structures, systems and processes that are greater than the individuals who embody those identities. We will read select essays from the text American Identities in order to bring to the fore those issues that are most relevant to our understanding of these structures, systems and processes. We will engage in intellectual debate about these issues at the same time as we explore and become more aware of how our own personal identities are shaped by personal motivations and by forces outside our control.

WHAT'S LAW GOT TO DO WITH IT?

We will segue from the focused study of identity, diversity and pluralism to examine the struggles of diverse groups in the U.S. for legal rights and cultural citizenship through legal action. In this aspect of our study, we will move between the past and the present in order to trace the roots of America's "identity" as a white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian society. This will provide the context within which to understand how and why racial, ethnic, indigenous, immigrant and religious groups, women, sexual minorities, and others have organized to draw attention to injustice and/or used the law to demand recognition and change on the basis of their differences.

CASE STUDIES IN AMERICAN CULTURAL PLURALISM AND LAW

In the last third of the semester, we will focus our attention on specific cases in which the law was used in a negotiation between a culturally different group and the larger society. In particular, we will examine cases related to indigenous peoples, African Americans, Japanese Americans, and women. Our examination of these case studies will be informed by our understanding of larger social and cultural structures, systems and processes and by our understanding of structural inequality and injustice – aspects we studied in the first two-thirds of the semester.