As race has often been used in the United States to make sense and uphold racial citizenship and racial stratification along a black-white racial logic, the ethnographies of South Asian Americans and Kurdish Americans complicate the racial narrative. As strange racial figures, especially in the Bible-belt US South, they trouble the familiar dichotomous racial logic. Instead of being outsiders to racial citizenship, South Asian American and Kurdish American communities perform and offer their own renditions of citizenship, belonging, and race. For South Asian Americans, they have fluctuated between “Hindoo,” “Model Minority,” and “terrorist.” In the process, they have been racialized as different types of men. These men take part in the quintessential American sport of basketball as one means to create much more acceptable racial arrangements. Accordingly, they engage with the black-white lexicon while also offering their own South Asian idioms as markers of race. Kurdish Americans interrogate long histories of colonialism and empires as one way to negotiate diasporic life in the United States. Some Kurds in the U.S. look to “Indo-European” language families and Islam as a way to construct (racial) difference from Arabs. Through their folk classifications of race, they adjudicate their history in the Middle East/Central Asia and in the United States. They claim a “whiteness” at a moment of the “global war on terror” that does not always translate into accruing the “wages of whiteness.” Yet, some Kurdish American activists have used Islam as the site for collaborative work and creating a global ummah that is critical of U.S. imperialism locally and globally. Both South Asian and Kurdish Americans demonstrate the shifting, messy, and contradictory life of race and citizenship in the United States.

Stanley Thangaraj is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at City College (CUNY). He is the author of Desi Hoop Dreams: Pickup Basketball and the Making of Asian American Masculinity (NYU Press, 2015) and the co-editor of Sport and South Diasporas (Routledge, 2014) and Asian American Sporting Cultures (NYU Press, 2016). His newest project is on Kurdish America and the negotiation of race at the intersections of Islam, U.S. Empire, and global war on terror.