**Questions for *Being Irish* and Bernard Shaw’s “What is an Irishman?”**

**Directions**:

* Please **read** **all of the essays** selected from the anthology *Being Irish* and be prepared to discuss them. (These are posted on the course web site under “Required Readings.”) Mark what you think might pass for the thesis of each, and note the unique insights each writer makes. (Expect some overlap and repetition, though, among the lot of them.)
* I’d like all of you to **write a response to the last question**--#6.
* Then **choose TWO** additional questions below to answer at some length (aim for a good paragraph each, around 100-200 words).

Note: Don’t worry if you don’t get every reference or recognize every name in these essays. The book is intended for people with more familiarity with Irish history and culture than most American college students can be expected to have. The Shaw selection has a few footnotes to help.

* Please **TYPE your answers** (but not the questions) and **print them out** to turn them in at the beginning of class.
* Please **bring the readings with you to class**, preferably in hard copy but on an electronic device if necessary.

1. Several of these essays offer the perspective of someone who lives in Ireland but feel they are perceived by the majority of the Irish as outsiders: Irish transplant **Moosajee Bhamjee**, who was born in south Africa of Indian ancestry; **Martin Collins**, who belongs to the Irish Traveller community (gypsies, basically); **Fee Ching Leong**, who was born in West Malaysia but has lived in Northern Ireland since her college days; and **Julia Neuberger**, who has chosen to live in Ireland, though she is technically British because her German-Jewish grandparents fled to England during WWII and stayed there and lived there.

Discuss what each says about the extent to which they identify themselves as Irish and why. Discuss also what each says about why they *don’t* feel Irish. Can you draw any general principles from these “outsiders” about how “mainstream” Irish people draw that line between “us” and “them”? What factors seem to matter the most? Ancestry? Religion? Race? Residency? Do you think their children would be considered “real” Irish people, even if their parents aren’t?

1. **Frank McCourt**, who was born in America and has lived most of his life here, has nevertheless contributed significantly to contemporary American views on Irish culture through his memoirs of his Irish upbringing, one of which became a popular film. Discuss what he says here about the dual identity—Irish and American—that so many in the US share, to one degree or another. If you have Irish ancestry yourself, discuss how his observations about how the Irish are defined, both by themselves and others, has affected your own identity.
2. Like McCourt, **Joe Lee** discusses how Irish and American identity affect each other, but he also emphasizes how much and how fast Irish identity is changing, not just from its close ties to America but also from its sudden economic boom in the Celtic Tiger era, among other changes. Despite the note of optimism in the last paragraph, can you detect a certain uneasiness in his discussion of this “hinge moment” in Irish history? What does he seem to be worried about? Does anything in this sound familiar in terms of pressures you’ve seen in Silicon Valley as it passes through its latest tech boom and the increasing diversity of its residents? Is there something universal here, or something particularly Irish (or American) in Joe Lee’s response to change?
3. **Jane Morrice** is the only one of these essayists who says that she *isn’t* really Irish: she considers herself *Northern* Irish and European. Despite her insistence that to call her “Irish” is as much a mistake as to call a Canadian “American,” she also deconstructs the distinction between Americans, Europeans, British and Irish people. How does her essay work to explain this paradox? What does the evolution of her own identity say about human identity in general?
4. **Bernard Shaw** was writing in 1906 (that is, before Ireland had established its independence from English rule) for a primarily English and Irish readership, though you can tell in “The Protestant Garrison” section that he is speaking primarily to the English. What does he seem to most value in the Irish character, as he defines it? What does he most deplore about the Irish? Which of the *Being Irish* essayists does he seem most in tune with?

Note: When he uses the term “Republican and Home Ruler” it just means he believes Ireland should be an independent republic and rule itself. It has nothing to do with the American Republican party. Also, it might be useful to know that Shaw was born (1856) and raised in Dublin until he was 20, at which point he moved to England and stayed there, becoming a hugely successful and world-famous writer but always writing as an Irish gadfly and outsider.

PLEASE everyone answer the next one:

1. Considering all of these meditations on identity, discuss what factors and experiences have shaped **your own identity** so far. In form, you can use the more narrative-autobiographical style of Jane Morrice and Fee Ching Leong or the more analysis-based, sociological style of Martin Collins and Frank McCourt. Somewhere in there, though, there should be an identifiable thesis. Do refer to at least one or two of the other essays while making your own statement.