CAST/HIST 260
Introduction to Asian American History

Professor Shelley Lee

Spring 2016
MWF 1:30 – 2:20 KING 127

Japanese American artist Roger Shimomura’s “Crossing the Delaware” (2010)

4 SS, CD

Office hours: MF 10:00-11:30
King 141-G

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES
This course provides an introduction to the histories of people of Asian descent in the United States, covering the late 18th to early 21st centuries. Using a thematic and chronological approach, we will pursue questions that aim to deepen our appreciation of the past while enriching our understanding of the connections between past and present. We focus on the experiences people with ancestries in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, exploring commonalities and differences along the lines of nationality, class, gender, religion, place, and other factors. Topics to be addressed include: global capitalism and labor migration; anti-Asian racism and exclusion; community formation and ethnic solidarity; “Yellow Peril” and “Model Minority” stereotypes; political activism; and the construction of the category “Asian American.” We approach Asian American history with an interest in how the subject has evolved into a vital field that also comprises key subfields of U.S. history and American studies. Furthermore, we eschew the claim that an “authentic” or “typical” Asian American experience exists, instead working from the supposition that Asian Americans and their lives are multifaceted, complex, and dynamic.

As this is chiefly a history course, we will emphasize mastering historical knowledge, interpreting primary sources, critically engaging secondary materials, and thinking historiographically. Other
approaches—including cultural, anthropological, and sociological—will supplement our study. We will work to apply historical knowledge to theoretical questions as well as contemporary issues relating to identity, assimilation, and social relations in a multicultural and multiracial America. Thus, while academic approaches inform the course, we will return continually to questions about the larger relevance of Asian American history, as well as ethnic studies and history.

Course readings reflect both current directions as well as “classics” and major interpretations in the field. Because facts and evidence are the bedrock of historical research and interpretation, you will be expected to learn, retain, and explain the significance of important people, dates, and events, which is the purpose of the in-class exams. Lastly, the papers, museum visits, and group project aim to expose students to a variety of ways that history matters: from hands on engagement with artifacts and texts to bringing historical knowledge into timely conversations, and telling stories about history through digital media. By the end of the semester, students should have gained tools for and exposure to using Asian American history to think through categories such as race, ethnicity, empire, and citizenship; employing historical knowledge to prompt informed dialogue about Asian Americans specifically and race more generally; honing skills in critical reading, clear writing, and oral expression; and working collaboratively in teams.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at Oberlin Bookstore and on reserve at Mudd)
Vivek Bald, Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian Americans (Harvard UP, 2013)
Cindy I-Fen Cheng, Citizens of Asian America: Democracy and Race During the Cold War (NYU Press, 2013)
Shelley Sang-Hye Lee, A New History of Asian America (Routledge, 2013)
Eric Tang, Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto (Temple UP, 2015)

Other required readings are available on Blackboard.

GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS
Final grades are calculated from a possible total of 200 points.

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Blackboard posts and pre-discussion (15%). At the start of each session, a group of students and I will have a brief conversation about the reading and issues it raises. You will sign up for your dates, and over the semester, will have participated in these FOUR times. Prior to the meeting for
which you are assigned, you will post to Blackboard a paragraph (300 to 400 words is fine) on the reading (no later than 10:00 AM the day of class) addressing 1) what the readings are about; 2) what is the author’s main idea(s); 3) what you think about what you read; 4) any further questions that are raised. Above all show that you have learned from and thoughtfully considered the materials. Posters should feel free to respond to one another. I will draw on these for our start of class conversations. This requirement is not graded, but comments that are late or fail to demonstrate substance and thoughtfulness will not receive credit.

**Paper #1 (15%).** For this 4-5 page paper, you will do a close reading and analysis of a textual artifact, i.e., primary document, from early Asian American history. Your paper will be evaluated on clarity of expression and presentation; ability to provide a close, thoughtful, and critical reading of the document’s contents; success in locating the document in its proper historical context; and effective linking of document and issues to broader themes and questions in Asian American history. Further details on this assignment will be given in class.

**Paper #2 (15%).** Exploring what it means to be a public intellectual, you will write an 800 to 900-word op-ed that is framed by or draws on Asian American history. You should connect course material to a recent event or subject of current interest. Think about what is salient about class readings and discussions and then link those insights to a timely question or issue. Then translate your academic knowledge for a nonacademic audience, making a clear argument supported with compelling evidence and written clearly and concisely.

**In-class exams (30%).** These will be given during Weeks 7 and 14 and will test you on reading and lecture content.

**Team-produced digital narrative (25%).** Working in a team, you will research and produce a digital narrative about a topic in Asian American history that we have not covered in class. We will get a tutorial on how to create short films using iMovie and other applications. You will work on this through most of the semester and unveil them during finals period.

**Attendance.** Do show your respect for the class by being punctual and prepared. This portion of your grade is based on attendance sheets circulated at the start of class, which you are responsible for signing. While attendance doesn’t comprise a fixed percentage of your grade, it is mandatory and will be factored into your final grade. Any absences must be made up with an extra assignment (arranged with me beforehand), otherwise each missed class will result in three points subtracted from your final grade. Exceeding five absences will result in failing the course. Excessive tardiness and disruptiveness will also negatively affect your grade.

**In-class participation.** Participation will be factored into your final grade, either bumping you up or down. If you attend class but never speak (aside from required Blackboard discussion), you’ll be bumped down a third of a grade. If you do not participate and have a sporadic attendance record, this portion will be docked an entire grade. On the other hand, if you participate regularly, you’ll
be bumped up, as much as a third of a grade. If you’re uneven, it will have a negligible to no impact. On participation, strive to be a thoughtful discussant and attentive listener. You should demonstrate a careful consideration of the reading, engagement with the subject, respect for your classmates’ ideas and opinions, and thoughtfulness of expression.

Grades for coursework are based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of materials, and quality of expression. Although I will accept late papers, these will be penalized 1/3 of a grade for each day late and not receive extensive written feedback.

HONOR SYSTEM

By enrolling in this class, you agree to abide by Oberlin’s Honor System. This means that you will not plagiarize or cheat on assignments, and that all written work will include a signed honor pledge (“I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in the assignment”). On papers, you must cite all written sources that you consulted, whether you quote directly or paraphrase. This is true whether you are using electronic or printed materials. Incomplete or improper citations are a form of plagiarism. If you are unfamiliar with proper citation formats, or have questions please consult me, a reference librarian, a writing tutor and/or a style manual. Failure to adhere to the Honor Code will result in a grade penalty, withholding of a grade, and/or reporting to the Student Honor Committee. Oberlin’s honor policy can be viewed at

CLASSROOM RULES, ETIQUETTE, AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

While individual students bring their varied backgrounds, we are also a learning community, brought together by a common interest and desire to learn. The course materials and discussions will provoke a range of reactions, and in-class discussions may reveal disagreements with classmates. I expect everyone to commit to making our classroom a space for each person to explore new ideas, ask questions of me and each other, take intellectual risks, and engage in open, honest, respectful debate.

Everyone must do their part to ensure a productive and focused learning environment. In this regard, be mindful of others and refrain from behaving in a way that is willfully disruptive or disrespectful (e.g., interrupting others, badgering, and making ad hominem attacks). It is also distracting and rude to engage in personal conversation or other diversions unrelated to class activity. Students who persist in such behavior may be asked to leave the class. Leaving the room during class is also distracting, so do take care of your needs beforehand to avoid this disruption. I understand that compelling needs may force you to leave the room, so if this is the case, do inform me of any concerns. Otherwise, habitually leaving the room without explanation will be counted as absences.
The use of cell phones and other mobile devices in class is disruptive and therefore prohibited, except in emergencies. Turn off your devices or put them on silent mode. Students are permitted to use computers for note-taking purposes or reading reference only. Regarding laptops, the education research overwhelmingly shows that students learn and absorb information more effectively when taking notes by hand. The use of laptops in class has been shown to undermine the learning not only of the laptop user, but of nearby classmates, due to the distraction they can pose (see links below for more). At the same time, I understand that students increasingly do their readings on computers, and that they can facilitate certain in-class activities. Because of this, I have not instituted a ban on laptops, though I strongly encourage you to take notes by hand and refrain from taking your computer out, unless specifically. If I receive complaints that computers in class are creating a distracting learning atmosphere, I will implement a ban.

ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES
If you are unable to complete the class, the College allows two kinds of incompletes, educational and emergency. You can read about these on the Dean of Studies website:
http://new.oberlin.edu/office/dean-of-studies/policies/incompletes.dot

DISABILITY SERVICES
The college will make accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should notify the Office of Disability Services located in Peters G-27/G-28 (440-774-5588) and their instructor of any disability related needs.
SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Approaches to Asian American History

2/1 Introduction and course objectives
2/3 Orientalism before Asian America
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Introduction and Chapter 1
2/5 Discussion
   Reading: Ckihiro, “Margin as Mainstream” (Bb); Bald, Bengali Harlem, Ch. 1

WEEK 2: Migration and Settlement in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries

2/8 Migration against empire and global capitalism
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 2, Yung “Bound Feet” (Bb)
2/10 Initial encounters
   Reading: Bald, Bengali Harlem, Ch. 2
2/12 Museum visit. Instructions on AMAM rules and etiquette will be given in class.
   Reading: Chang, “Emerging from the Shadows” (Bb)

WEEK 3 Labor and Inequality Under Capitalism

2/15 Asian labor U.S. industrial development
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 3; Bald, Bengali Harlem, Ch. 3
2/17 Opportunity and exploitation
   Reading: Lee, “A Life Cooking for Others” (Bb); Bald, Bengali Harlem, Ch. 4
2/19 Instead of our regular meeting, this session has been rescheduled for noon. You are
   required to attend a talk by Yuichiro Onishi (Associate Professor of African and African
   American Studies, University of Minnesota) in Wilder 101. In preparation for this talk, read
   his chapter “New Negro Radicalism and Pro-Japan Provocation” (Bb).

WEEK 4 Community and Family

2/22 Obstacles and breakthroughs in family formation
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 4; Okihiro, “When and Where I Enter” (Bb)
2/24 Beyond the ethnic community: multiethnic and multiracial formations
   Reading: Bald, Bengali Harlem, Ch. 5-6
2/26 Session on group projects
   Reading: Digital narratives produced for HIST/CAST 260 in Spring 2015. Go to the videos
   on the CAST Facebook page to view.
WEEK 5 Racism and the Anti-Asian Movements

2/29 The logic and mechanics of exclusion
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 5; Chang, “Circulating Race and Empire” (Bb) (Bb)

3/2 Gender, sexuality and anti-Asian racism
Reading: Shah, “Between Oriental Depravity and Natural Degenerates” (Bb)

3/4 Discussion
Reading: “Meat vs. Rice” (Bb)
FIRST PAPER DUE

WEEK 6: Response and Resistance

3/7 Legal resistance and activism
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 6

3/9 Homeland nationalism, labor organizing, and daily acts of resistance
Reading: Khor, “Dangerous Amusements” (Bb)

3/11 Discussion
Reading: “Why am I a Heathen?” (Bb)

WEEK 7: Modernity and the Second Generation

3/14 Asian America during the 1920s-1930s
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 7; Wu, “Was Mom Chung a Sister Lesbian?” (Bb)

3/16 In-class exam

3/18 No class
Reading (strongly recommended): Rudrappa, “The International Surrogacy Market” (Bb). Please take a look at this short article in advance of the panel with Prof. Rudrappa and Prof. Clutario, for April 6. This is also a good example of an academic op-ed, based on Rudrappa’s ethnographic research.

WEEK 8: Spring Recess (March 19-March 27)

WEEK 9: World War II

3/28 Revisiting Japanese internment
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 8; Baldoz, “Another Mirage of Democracy"
3/30 Museum visit
Reading: Lee, “Local Images for International Eyes” (Bb)

4/1 Workshop on how to write op-eds
Reading: Baldoz and Lee, “Decades of Xenophobia Shape Response to Syrian Refugees” (Bb); Chin, “America Has Freaked Out Over Birthright Citizenship for Centuries” (Bb)

WEEK 10: The Cold War

4/4 The origins of the “model minority”
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 9; Cheng, Citizens of Asian America, Ch. 1-2

4/6 Guest lecture by Genevieve Clutario, Harvard University
Reading: Cheng, Citizens of Asian America, Ch. 3
Intersection Womanhoods panel at 4:30 with Genevieve Clutario (Harvard) and Sharmila Rudrappa (UT Austin). Location tba. Attendance is required.

4/8 Discussion
Reading: Cheng, Citizens of Asian America, Ch. 4

WEEK 11: Vietnam and Southeast Asian Migration

4/11 Intersections of war and migration
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 10; Tang, Unsettled Ch. 1

4/13 The anti-model minorities?
Reading: Tang, Unsettled, Ch. 2-3

4/15 Discussion
Reading: Tang, Unsettled, Ch. 4

WEEK 12: “Yellow Power” and a New Politics

4/18 The meanings and practices of “yellow power”
Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 11

4/20 Feminism and cultural politics
Reading: Wu, “Hypervisibility and Invisibility” (Bb); Maeda, “Performing Radical Culture” (Bb)

4/22 Discussion
Reading: Chan, “Revolutionaries and Reformers” (Bb)
SECOND PAPER DUE

WEEK 13: Newcomers Redux Since 1965
4/25  The dismantling of exclusion and comprehensive reform
       Reading: Cheng, *Citizens of Asian America*, Ch. 5; Lee, *A New History*, Ch. 12
       Extra credit opportunity: Celine Parrenas Shimizu, filmmaker and professor at SF State will
give a talk 4/25 at noon (location tba), titled, “Screening Shirtless AZN Men: The Full
Frontal Power of Intimate Internet Industries”
4/27  New formations and identities
       Reading: Tang, *Unsettled*, Ch. 5-6
4/29  (no class)

**WEEK 14: The Recent Past and What’s Ahead**

5/2   New frontiers and expanding boundaries
       Reading: Lee, *A New History*, Ch. 13; Maira, “Youth Culture, Globalization, and
       Citizenship” (Bb)
5/4   In-class exam
5/6   Being Asian American in the 21st century
       Reading: Lee, *A New History*, Epilogue; Yu, “Has Asian American Studies Failed?” (Bb)

In lieu of a final exam, the class will meet on **Wednesday, May 11, 9:00 to 11:00 AM** (location
tba) to share group projects.