

COMPARATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES/HISTORY 260

ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Fall 2008
Professor Lee



Chinese bathhouse workers in San Francisco, 1930s



Posting notices announcing Japanese evacuation in Bainbridge Island, Washington, March 1942

3 SS CD
MW 2:30-3:45 King 337

Office hours and location:
Tuesday and Wednesday 10:00:-11:00 (or schedule appointment)
King 141-F
Email: shelley.lee@oberlin.edu

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course introduces students to the histories of people of Asian ancestry in the United States from the nineteenth century to the present. No assumption is made that one "authentic" Asian American experience exists; rather it is explicitly acknowledged that the experiences of Asian Americans are multifaceted and complex. We will focus on the experiences of peoples from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, exploring patterns and similarities in experience, while examining key differences along the lines of nationality, class, gender, sexuality and other categories. Topics we will explore include: U.S. imperialism and Asian migration; Asian labor in the development of the American West; anti-Asian movements and exclusion; ethnic community formation and generational change; historical images from the Yellow Peril to the Model Minority; and the forging of a pan-Asian coalition in the 1960s and continuing challenges of defining "Asian Americanness."

While our study of Asian American history will cover significant events, people, and developments, we will also employ a social history approach in which we will examine lived experiences “from the ground up.” Additionally, this course will provide a grounded understanding of the ways in which Asian American history constitutes a crucial part of United States history writ large. As a history course, there will be an emphasis on mastering historical knowledge and critically analyzing primary documents, but other disciplinary approaches, including cultural, anthropological, and sociological will supplement our study. Additionally, we will discuss how historical knowledge can be utilized to clarify theoretical concerns and contemporary issues pertaining to matters of identity, belonging, and social relations in a multiracial and multicultural America. Another way that this class may differ from other history courses is that we will take a *thematic* rather than strictly chronological approach. This means that the lectures will often focus on topical questions in Asian American history and offer interpretations that link the past to the present. Lectures will also present a central narrative, the chronological “story” of principal events and issues, while readings and discussion topics will build upon, and at times problematize, that narrative.

We will meet twice a week, with each class session consisting of lecture and discussion. You are expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned reading for each day. In discussion, you are expected to exchange and debate in a respectful, rigorous manner. Written assignments and in-class exams will require demonstrating mastery of historical knowledge, critical thinking and clear expression through engagement with primary as well as secondary sources.

REQUIREMENTS

Books at Oberlin Bookstore

Sucheng Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian Refugees in the United States* (University of Illinois Press, 2004)

Madeline Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1953* (Stanford University Press, 2000)

Linda España Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila: Working Class Filipinos and Popular Culture in the United States* (Columbia University Press, 2006)

Eric Muller, *Free to Die for Their Country: The Story of Japanese American Draft Resisters in World War II* (University of Chicago Press, 2001)

Mari Yoshihara, *Musicians from a Different Shore: Asians and Asian Americans in Classical Music* (Temple University Press, 2007)

Ji-Yeon Yuh, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America* (NYU Press, 2003)

Other required readings are available on Blackboard. Look under “Course Documents” or link to the readings through the “Syllabus” page.

Grading

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

193 - 200	A+	153 – 159	C+
186 - 192	A	147 – 152	C
180 - 185	A-	140 – 146	C-
174 - 179	B+	120 – 139	D

167 - 173 B 119 & below F
160 - 166 B-

Final grades will be determined based on the following:

Attendance and punctuality (10 points, 5% of final grade). Attendance is required. Class will begin promptly at 2:30 and end at 3:45. At the start of each class, I will make announcements and circulate an attendance sheet from which you will check your name. It is your responsibility to make sure you have checked your name, as this will be my only record of attendance that I will use to calculate this portion of your grade. You are allowed three unpenalized absences, and beyond that, each additional absence will result in a deduction of 3 points from your final grade. Excessive tardiness will be counted as absences.

In-class participation (10 points, 5% of final grade). This portion of your grade is evaluated on demonstrated preparation, thoughtfulness of contribution, regularity of participation, and respectfulness of your classmates and the instructor. You will be evaluated twice for participation during the term, on a 5-point scale, once after Week 7 and then after Week 15. These scores will be combined and then computed into your final grade.

Blackboard postings (2 points each, 10% of final grade). You are required to post TEN times during the semester. In your postings, you should, in one or two paragraphs, thoughtfully respond to the assigned reading for a given date, explaining what you found interesting, how the author illuminates some aspect of Asian American history, and posing a question raised by the reading that you would like to discuss in class. To receive credit, you must post by midnight the day before class. You can access the discussion group through the "Communications" tab in the course website on Blackboard.

Primary source essay (20 points, 10% of final grade). You will do a close reading of and analyze a primary document relating to the anti-Chinese or anti-Japanese movements. You must analyze the document's content and also place it in its historical context, drawing on course materials. I will provide a packet of materials containing the documents from which you will choose. Further guidelines will be given in class. Due Friday, **October 10**, 10:00 AM outside my office.

Memoir/autobiography essay (40 points, 20% of final grade). You will write about a historical memoir by an Asian American, discussing the effectiveness of the memoir itself, how it illuminates your understanding of Asian American history, and the utility of reading memoirs to study history. Your essay must contextualize the work by engaging with course readings. You will make your selection based on a list I distribute, though you are welcome to make your own selection, as long as you let me know in advance. Due Friday, **November 21**, 10:00 AM outside my office.

Two in-class exams (30 points each, 30% of final grade). These are aimed at ensuring that you are keeping up with readings and lectures and will consist of short answer questions, identifications, and one essay. The first will be on **October 1** and the second will be on **November 26**.

Take home final (40 points, 20% of final grade). Essay exam drawing cumulatively on the semester's themes and topics. It will be distributed in class on December 10 and is due **December 16**.

Grades for coursework will be based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of materials, and quality of expression. For all written assignments, you must turn in hard copies. Generally, I do not give extensions and any late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late. I may make an exception if you speak with me well before a due date.

HONOR CODE

By enrolling in this class you are agreeing to abide by Oberlin's Honor Code and Honor System. Be sure you have read and understood your rights and responsibilities.

SPECIAL NEEDS

I will make every effort to accommodate the needs of students with physical or learning disabilities. Do see me as soon as possible to discuss any modifications that might be necessary.

OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACTING ME

The best way to contact me about discussing course related matters is to come to office hours. I strongly encourage each of you to visit at least once during the term, if only to introduce yourself. You may contact me via email, and I will do my best to reply in a timely manner, though I usually do not check email after 10:00PM.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 BEGINNINGS

Sept. 3 Course introduction and goals

WEEK 2 CONTACT AND MIGRATION IN THE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES

Sept. 8 Asia in the western imagination before immigration
Reading: Tchen, "What Does China Want?"; Chang, "Whose 'Barbarism'? Whose 'Treachery'?"

Sept. 10 Trans-Pacific migrations
Reading: Hsu, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-54)

WEEK 3 LIFE AND WORK IN EARLY ASIAN AMERICA

Sept. 15 Asian labor and the development of the West
Reading: Liu, "Asparagus Farming, Family Business, and Immigrant Sensibility" and Walz, "From Kumamoto to Idaho"; "Chinese Labor in New England" (primary document)

Sept. 17 Building and sustaining families and communities
Reading: Hsu, Chapters 4-6 (pp. 91-175)

WEEK 4 ANTI-ASIAN MOVEMENTS

Sept. 22 The ideological underpinnings of anti-Asian racism
Reading: Samuel Gompers, "Meat vs. Rice"; Gardner, "Working on White Womanhood"

Sept. 24 The politics of prejudice: enacting exclusion from the Page Act to 1924
Reading: Hsu, Chapter 3; Ngai, "The Architecture of Race in American Immigration Law"

WEEK 5 EXCLUSION AND RESISTANCE

Sept. 29 Challenging discrimination in the courts and the streets
Reading: Maram, Chapters 1-3 (pp. 15-104)

Oct. 1 EXAM #1

WEEK 6 BECOMING AMERICAN, BEING TRANSNATIONAL

Oct. 6 Transnational politics and diasporic Asian Americans
Reading: Ramnath, "Two Revolutions"; Kim, "Inaugurating the American Century"

Oct. 8 Assimilation and identity among youth and the second generation
Reading: Maram, Chapter 4 (pp. 105-134); Kurashige, "The Problem of Biculturalism"

PRIMARY SOURCE ESSAY DUE OCTOBER 10:00 AM OUTSIDE MY OFFICE

WEEK 7 WORLD WAR II

- Oct. 13 Pearl Harbor, anti-Japanese hysteria and the bifurcation of Asian America
Reading: Maram, Chapter 5 (pp. 135-164); Muller, Chapters 2-5 (pp. 8-99)
- Oct. 15 Loyalty and dissent in Japanese America
Reading: Muller, Chapters 6-9 (pp. 100-192)

WEEK 8 *FALL RECESS*****

WEEK 9 POSTWAR TRANSITIONS

- Oct. 27 Resettlement and reform
Reading: Brooks, "In the Twilight Zone Between Black and White"; Yuh, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-83)
- Oct. 29 The image and lives of Asian military wives in America
Reading: Yuh, Chapters 3-5 (pp. 84-187)

WEEK 10 THE COLD WAR AND ASIAN RADICALS

- Nov. 3 The Cold War origins of the model minority
Reading: Yuh, Chapter 6 (pp. 188-222)
- Nov. 5 Third World solidarity during the Vietnam War and Yellow Power
Reading: Maeda, "Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen"; Umemoto, "On Strike!"

WEEK 11 THE NEW INFLUX: 1965 AND BEYOND

- Nov. 10 Strangers at the gates again
Reading: Chan, Chapters 1-2 (pp. 1-80)
- Nov. 12 Casualties of war: refugee migrants
Reading: Chan, Chapter 3-4 (pp. 81-161)

WEEK 12 CLASS AND POLITICS IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL AND POST-CIVIL RIGHTS AGE

- Nov. 17 Refugee adaptation and struggle in America
Reading: Chan, Chapters 5-6 (162-226)
- Nov. 19 Plural America and the politics of interethnic relations
Reading: Stevenson, "Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin"; Omi and Takagi, "Situating Asian Americans in the Political Discourse on Affirmative Action"

MEMOIR PAPER DUE NOV. 21, 10:00 AM OUTSIDE MY OFFICE

WEEK 13 FOREVER FOREIGNERS? YELLOW PERIL REDUX

Nov. 24 From Vincent Chin to Wen-Ho Lee
Reading: Kurashige, "Panethnicity and Community Organizing," Lien, "Public Resistance Against Electing Asian Americans in Southern California"

Nov. 26 EXAM #2

WEEK 14 PRACTICES AND DISCOURSES OF DOMINANCE IN CONTEMPORARY ASIAN AMERICA

Dec. 1 Guest lecture by Professor Pawan Dhingra, Department of Sociology, Oberlin
Reading: Yoshihara, Chapters 1-3

Dec. 3 Asians and Asian Americans in the "mainstream"
Reading: Yoshihara, Chapters 4-5

WEEK 15 ONGOING DEBATES AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Dec. 8 Guest lecture by Aaron Cavin, History Ph.D. candidate, University of Michigan
Reading: TBD

Dec. 10 What is Asian America today?
Reading: TBD
TAKE HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED

TAKE HOME FINAL DUE DECEMBER 16, 2:00 PM OUTSIDE MY OFFICE

**The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. I will notify you in class and via Blackboard of any updates.