CAST/HIST 260: Asian American History

Spring 2012

Professor Shelley Lee

3 Credits SS CD
TR 1:30 – 2:45 King 341

Office Hours: Thursdays 10-12
King 141-F
shelee@oberlin.edu

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course provides an introduction to the histories of people of Asian descent in the United States from the late eighteenth to early twenty-first centuries. In addition to exploring the distinctiveness of Asian American history as a field of study, we will assess the ways in which Asian American history is itself a crucial subfield of American history. 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 people with ancestries in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, exploring common patterns while also addressing differences based on factors such as nationality, class, gender, and religion. Topics we will explore include: U.S. global expansion and Asian migration; capitalism and labor migration; anti-Asian movements and exclusion; community formation and solidarity; stereotypes of “Yellow Peril” and “Model Minority”; political activism; and the diversity of delineating “Asian America.”

Because this is a history course, we will emphasize mastering historical knowledge, reading primary documents, and thinking historiographically, but other disciplinary approaches, including cultural, anthropological, and sociological, will supplement our study. We will also apply our historical knowledge to explore theoretical questions and contemporary problems pertaining to identity, assimilation, and social relations in a multicultural and multiracial America. Taking both a thematic and chronological approach, the class will focus on topical questions in Asian American history and offer interpretations that link the past to the present. At the same time, lectures will present a central narrative, the chronological “story” of principal events and issues in Asian American history.

Course objectives include using Asian American history to think through analytical categories such as race, ethnicity, empire, and citizenship; employing historical knowledge as a tool for informed dialogue about Asian Americans specifically and race relations more generally; and honing skills in critical reading and thinking, working with primary and secondary materials, and writing and oral expression.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at Oberlin Bookstore)
Maxine Hong Kingston, China Men (Vintage, 1989)
Nayan Shah, Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West (University of California, 2012)

Other required readings will be available on Blackboard.

**GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS**

Final grades will be calculated from a possible total of 200 points.

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**Attendance and participation (10%).** Please show your respect for the class by being on time, prepared, and attentive. Punctuality is crucial, as we begin at 1:30, not 1:35 or 1:40. Unless you provide documentation, you must make up missed classes with an extra assignment(s) to be arranged with me. Each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of three points from your final grade. Excessive tardiness will likewise negatively affect your grade. On participation, you should 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. Contributions should be focused on the material and topic at hand.

**Blackboard posts (5%).** Twice during the semester, you will post your answer to a prompt relating to an assigned reading on Blackboard. I will provide the prompt in class or email prior to the class meeting in which we will discuss your response. These will serve as a warm up for discussion, so you should be prepared to elaborate on your response in class. For days you are not posting, you should read your classmates’ responses as part of your preparation for class. In addition to addressing the prompt, you should demonstrate that you have done a close, thoughtful reading of the material and can relate them to the course’s broader themes. This requirement is not graded, but posts and comments fail to demonstrate substance, thoughtfulness, and engagement will not receive credit.

**Primary source analysis (20%).** For this 4-5 page paper, you will do a close reading of and analyze a 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.

**Literature review (25%).** You will write a 6-7 page essay examining the state of research in a particular subfield of Asian American history by critically reviewing two scholarly books. One of the books you write on must be Yuh, Daniels, or Shah, and the other will be a thematically or topically related selection of your choice, though I will provide a list of suggested readings. You may comment
on how the field has changed by discussing one older book against a new one, or compare two recent works to assess the current state of the field. Possible subfields include but are not limited to South Asian American history, gender and sexuality, imperialism, the history of internment.

You will turn in a prospectus outlining your topic and selection and paper draft for peer review. The prospectus is due on April 3 and rough draft on May 1. The final paper is due May 10.

Midterm exam (20%). Take-home exam will test you on concepts and identifications covered in class and readings.

Final exam (20%). Take home exam, emphasizing material from the second half of the semester. This will be handed out on the last day of class and is due via Blackboard Saturday, May 19 by 11:00 AM.

Any late papers will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late and will not receive written comments.

HONOR CODE
By enrolling in this class, you are agreeing to abide by Oberlin’s Honor System. This means that you will refrain from plagiarizing and cheating, and that on all assignments you will write and sign the honor pledge (“I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in the assignment”). For 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 http://new.oberlin.edu/students/policies/2011-2012/11-Policies-Honor.pdf.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE
We will conduct class in a spirit of mutual respect and intellectual inquiry. We may have differing opinions on the topics of discussion, and I encourage you to question and debate with one another and me. However, disruptive or disrespectful conduct that includes interrupting others, badgering, and making ad hominem attacks will not be tolerated. 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 and penalized.

Leaving the room during class is distracting to the instructor and your classmates so please take care of your needs before class to avoid this disruption. I understand that compelling personal needs may force you to leave the room, so if this is the case, do inform me of any concerns, being as discreet as possible. Otherwise, habitually leaving the room without explanation will be counted as absences.

The use of cell phones or other mobile devices is disruptive, and therefore prohibited during class, except in emergencies. Turn off your devices or place them on silent mode while in class. Students are permitted to use computers for note-taking purposes only. If the use of computers for non-class purposes becomes a distraction, all laptops will be banned.
**ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES**
Incompletes at the end of the semester must receive approval from me at least 48 hours before the deadline.

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

**Week 1**  
*Approaches to Asian American History*

Feb. 7  
Course Introduction

Feb. 9  
The "Orient" before Asian America  
Reading: Tchen, “Porcelain, Tea, and Revolution” (Blackboard); Kingston, 3-81

**Week 2**  
*Migration and Settlement in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries*

Feb. 14  
Why They Came, Where They Went  
Reading: Shah, Ch. 1; Kingston, 83-122

Feb. 16  
Work and Economic Development  
Reading: Shah, Ch. 2-3; Kingston, 125-162

**Week 3**  
*Families and Communities*

Feb. 21  
Social organization and new ethnic communities  
Reading: Kingston, 163-220

Feb. 23  
Family, intimacy, and authority  
Reading: Kingston, 221-233; Takaki, “Plantation Camps” (Blackboard)

**Week 4**  
*The Anti-Asian Movements*

Feb. 28  
Discrimination and the anti-Asian movements  
Reading: Shah, Ch. 4-5; Baldoz, “‘Get Rid of All Filipinos or We’ll Burn this Town Down’” (Blackboard)

Mar. 1  
Closing the Gates  
Reading: Kingston, 237-308; Daniels, “Exclusion” (Blackboard)

**Week 5**  
*Resistance and Responses to Discrimination*

Mar. 6  
Fighting back in the courts, streets, and papers  
Reading: Wong, “Cultural Defenders and Brokers” (Blackboard)  
*Primary Source Analysis due*

Mar. 8  
Internal resources and external bridges  
Reading: Shah, Ch. 6-7
Week 6  
**Modernity and Americanization in the 1920s and 1930s**

Mar. 13 The Second Generation and Popular Culture  
Reading: Lim, “‘I Protest’: Anna May Wong and the Performance of Modernity” (Blackboard); Yu, “Wanted: Interpreters and Informants” (Blackboard)

Mar. 15 Asian Americans during the Great Depression  
Reading: Yung, “Long Strides” (Blackboard)

Week 7  
**World War II**

Mar. 20 The Pacific War and the Decision to Incarcerate  
Reading: Daniels, Ch. 2-3  
*Take home mid-term distributed*

March 22 Asian Americans and the War  
Reading: Daniels, Ch. 4; Brooks, “In the Twilight Zone Between Black and White” (Blackboard)  
*Midterms due via Blackboard Friday, March 23 by 8:00 PM*

Week 8  
**SPRING BREAK**

Week 9  
**The Cold War**

Apr. 3 Global Realignments and the Dismantling of Exclusion  
Reading: Yuh, Ch. 1-3  
*Paper prospectus due*

Apr. 5 The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority  
Reading: Yuh, Ch. 4-6; “Chinatown Offers Us a Lesson” (Blackboard)

Week 10  
**The Asian American Movement and Political Activism**

Apr. 10 Yellow Power!  
Reading: Maeda, “Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen” (Blackboard); Selections from *Roots: An Asian American Reader* (Blackboard)

Apr. 12 Case Studies: The Fight for the I-Hotel and the Redress Movement  
Reading: Daniels, Ch. 5-6

Week 11  
**Remaking Asian America Since 1965**

Apr. 17 The Watershed of the Hart-Celler Act
Reading: Ngai, “The Liberal Critique and Reform of Immigration Policy” (Blackboard)

Apr. 19 The Post-65ers and the Transformation of Asian America
Reading: Choy, “To the Point of No Return” (Blackboard)

**Week 12**

**Vietnam and Southeast Asians**

Apr. 24 War and the refugee crisis
Reading: Yang, Ch. 1-7

Apr. 26 The impact of Southeast Asian migration on Asian America
Reading: Yang, 8-11; Lipman, “The Face is the Road Map” (Blackboard)

Event: “Narrating the Diaspora: The State and Stakes of Asian American Literature”
Thursday, April 26, 4:30 at Wilder 101

*Your attendance at this event, which features outside scholars of Asian American literature as well as Oberlin faculty, is required. For extra credit points, you can turn in a 1-page paper summarizing the discussion and reflecting on how literature plays an important role in understanding Asian American experience and identity. You are also encouraged to attend a poetry reading with Oberlin students afterward. More details about both events will be given in class.*

**Week 13**

**New Formations of Asian American Culture and Identity**

May 1 Asian American artists and the historical record
*For this session we will meet at the Allen Memorial Art Museum*
Reading: Chang, “From Out of the Shadows” (Blackboard)
*Paper draft due*

May 3 What is Asian American?/Peer-review session
Reading: King, “Racialization, Recognition, and Rights” (Blackboard); Your partner’s draft

**Week 14**

**Recent History and the Future of Asian America**

May 8 Intraminority relations and the Revival of Anti-Asianism
Reading: Zia, “Because of You Motherfuckers,” (Blackboard); Kim, “At Least You’re Not Black” (Blackboard)

May 10 Beyond 9-11
Reading: Yang, Ch. 12-15
*Final paper due*
*Final exam distributed (due May 19 by 11:00 AM)*

*The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. I will notify you in class or over email of any changes.*