COMPARATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES/HISTORY 260  
ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY  

Oberlin College  
Fall 2007

Tu Th 9:50-10:50  
King 343  
3 SS CD  

Professor Shelley Lee  
Office hours: Thurs. 11-1  
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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. Specifically we will focus on the experiences of peoples from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. We will explore patterns and similarities in experience, while also addressing important nationality, class, gender, and other differences among Asian Americans. 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.

This course has several objectives: to provide students with a grounded understanding of the ways in which the histories Asian people and people of Asian ancestry in the U.S. constitute a crucial part of American history writ large; to illuminate broader processes such as identity formation, racialization, and interethnic relations; and to impart historical knowledge as a tool to encourage informed dialogue about Asian Americans specifically and race relations more generally. The course also aims to hone students’ skills in reading and thinking critically, working with a variety of primary and secondary materials, writing with clarity and purpose, and discussing and debating in a respectful and rigorous manner.

As a history course, there will be strong emphasis on the mastery of historical knowledge and the use of primary documents, but other disciplinary approaches, including cultural, anthropological, and sociological will supplement our study. Additionally, we will apply our historical knowledge to illuminate important theoretical concerns and contemporary problems that pertain to issues of identity, belonging, and social relations in a multiracial America. Another way that this will 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 in Asian American history. Course topics include: U.S. imperialism and Asian migration; the significance of Asian labor in the development of the American West; anti-Asian movements and exclusion; the challenges of community formation and ethnic identity; historical images of from the Yellow Peril to the Model Minority; and the
forging of a pan-Asian coalition in the 1960s and continuing problems of panethnicity and the “Asian American” category.

REQUIREMENTS

Books at Oberlin Bookstore
Lon Kurashige and Alice Yang Murray, eds. Major Problems in Asian American History (Houghton Mifflin, 2002)
Mary Paik Lee, Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America (University of Washington Press, 1990)

Other required readings are available online through Blackboard, and additional materials will be distributed in class.

Final Grade Breakdown:

Attendance and in-class participation. Attendance is mandatory and your active participation class discussion will be integral in this course. If you miss class, you must complete a makeup assignment to be arranged with me. Excessive absences and tardiness will negatively affect your grade. (10%)

Online discussion. At the beginning of each week, I will post discussion questions on Blackboard. You are required to respond online 5 times over the semester. You may respond to my question as well as classmates’ comments. Your postings are due by Wednesday midnight. (10%)

Primary source essay. You are to write a 1200 word essay in which you address an important historical question in Asian American history, using a set of primary sources as your main body of evidence. Further details will be given in class. Due in class October 18. (25%)

Book review. You are to write a 1000 word scholarly review of one of the following books: At America’s Gates, Storied Lives, or Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila. This is due in class on December 6. (15%)

Two in-class quizzes. These are intended to ensure that you are keeping up with readings and lectures. The first will be on October 4 and the second will be on November 20. (15% total)
Final exam. Cumulative in-class exam, with slight emphasis on material from Weeks 13-15. December 19 9:00-11:00 AM (25%)

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 1/5 of a grade for each day late. I may make an exception if you speak with me well before a due date.

OBERLIN 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. You should make sure you are familiar with the Honor Code and Honor system. You can view it at this link: http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-reg07-08/honorcode.pdf.

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 what steps should be taken and 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 FRAMING ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY
Sept. 4 Course introduction and objectives
Sept. 6 Asian American history as American history, current trends and directions

Readings:
Major Problems, Chapter 1 essays by Roger Daniels, Ronald Takaki, Sylvia Yanagisako, and Bill Ong Hing

WEEK 2 BEGINNINGS
Sept. 11 Orientalism in American culture
Sept. 13 Capitalism, imperialism and the origins of Asian immigration

Readings:
WEEK 5  MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT  
Sept. 18  Motivations and patterns of migration  
Sept. 20  Asians in the development of the American West  

Readings:  
Major Problems, Chapter 5 Documents 1-4, 6, 8, essays by Sucheng Chan and Akira Iriye  
Quiet Odyssey, Chapters 1-7  

WEEK 4  RACISM AND EXCLUSION  
Sept. 25  Anti-Asian movements and Asian American responses  
Sept. 27  The architecture of immigration restriction  

Readings:  
Major Problems, Chapter 4 Documents 1, 2, 5-10 and essay by Mae Ngai  
At America’s Gates, Chapters 1-5  

WEEK 5  RESISTANCE AND REFORM  
Oct. 2  Fighting for rights at home and abroad  
Oct. 4  ***READING AND LECTURE QUIZ***  

Readings:  
Major Problems, Chapter 5 Document 6, 9 and essay by Lili Kim; Chapter 7 Document 8, 9  
At America’s Gates, Chapters 4-6  
Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila Chapter, 1  

WEEK 6  GENDER, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY  
Oct. 9  Bachelors, picture brides and the challenges of family formation  
Oct. 11  “Unbound feet”? Women in Asian America  

Readings:  
Major Problems, Chapter 7 Documents 3-7  
Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila, Chapter 2  
Quiet Odyssey Chapters 8-11  

WEEK 7  AMERICANIZATION AND CULTURAL AUTONOMY  
Oct. 16  Film: Forbidden City, USA  
Oct. 18  Culture as strategy, rise of the second generation
**PRINCIPAL SOURCE ANALYSIS DUE**

Readings:
*Major Problems*, Chapter 8 Documents 1-4, 7 and Judy Yung essay  
*Creating Masculinity in Little Manila*, Chapters 3-4  
*Storied Lives*, Chapters 1-3

WEEK 8  **FALL RECESS**

WEEK 9  SETBACKS AND OPPORTUNITIES DURING WORLD WAR II
Oct. 30  Film: *Rabbit in the Moon*  
Nov. 1  War and the changing fates of Asians in America

Readings:
*Major Problems*, Chapter 9 Documents 3, 7, 8 and essay by Alice Yang Murray  
*Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila*, Chapter 5  
*Storied Lives*, Chapters 4-6  
*Quiet Odyssey*, Chapter 12

WEEK 10  ASIAN AMERICANS AND THE COLD WAR
Nov. 6  Japanese American resettlement and postwar experiences  
Nov. 8  Asian Americans and Cold War culture

Readings  
*Major Problems*, Chapter 10 Documents 1-3, 6-9, essays by Paul Spickard, Arlene de Vera and Xiaoqian Zhao  
*Quiet Odyssey*, Chapter 13

WEEK 11  VIETNAM AND THE ASIAN AMERICAN MOVEMENT
Nov. 13  Third World solidarity during the Vietnam War and the Yellow Power Movement  
Nov. 15  Asian American Studies and Pan-Asianism

Readings:
*Major Problems*, Chapter 13 Documents 1-5  
Laura Pulido, “The Politicization of the Third World Left (Blackboard)  
Karen Umemoto, "On Strike!" San Francisco State College Strike, 1968-69: The Role of Asian American Students” (Blackboard)  
“Asian Americans Tell of Bigotry in Vietnam” (Blackboard)

WEEK 12  THANKSGIVING WEEK
Nov. 20  **READING AND LECTURE QUIZ**
Nov. 22  ***Thanksgiving holiday***

**WEEK 15  THE WATERSHED OF 1965**
Nov. 27  Legal reform and the renewal of Asian immigration
Nov. 29  New Asian American communities  

Readings:
*Major Problems* Chapter 11 Documents 1, 3, 8 and essay by Catherine Ceniza Choy; Chapter 12 Documents 1, 5 and essay by James M. Freeman and Usha Welaratna
*Quiet Odyssey*, Chapter 15

**WEEK 14  ASIAN AMERICAN POLITICAL AWAKENING**
Dec. 4  Film: *Who Killed Vincent Chin?*
Dec. 6  Racism, violence, and the emergence of an Asian American agenda
**REVIEW ESSAY DUE IN CLASS**

Readings:
Helen Zia, “Detroit Blues: ‘Because of You Motherfuckers’” (Blackboard)
“Violent Incidents Against Asian Americans…” (Blackboard)
“New Sense of Race Arises Among Asian Americans” (Blackboard)

**WEEK 15  ASIAN AMERICAN IDENTITIES**
Dec. 11  Who is an Asian American today? Identity and politics
Dec. 13  Asian Americans in the mainstream: Are we there yet?

Readings:
*Major Problems*, Chapter 13 Document 6 and essay by Yen Espiritu; Chapter 14 Document 4 and essay by Candace Fujikane
Frank Wu, “The Changing Face of America: Intermarriage and the Mixed Race Movement” (Blackboard)

Final Exam will be on Wednesday, December 19 9:00-11:00 AM.

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