CAST/HIST 260
Introduction to Asian American History

Professor Shelley Lee

Spring 2015
MWF 2:30-3:20 KING 327

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. 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. Specifically, we will focus on the experiences people with ancestries in China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Southeast Asia, and South Asia, exploring commonalities and differences due nationality, class, gender, religion, and other factors. Topics to be explored include: U.S. expansion and labor migration; anti-Asian movements and exclusion; community formation and solidarity; stereotypes of “Yellow Peril” and “Model Minority”; political activism; and the recent construction of “Asian American” identities. As we study what makes Asian American history an interesting and distinct field of study, we will do so with an eye on how it also comprises critical subfields of U.S. history and American studies. Furthermore, no claim will be made that an “authentic” or “typical” Asian American experience exists; instead we work from the supposition that Asian Americans and their lives are multifaceted, complex, and dynamic.

As this is a cross-listed course in History and Comparative American Studies, we will emphasize mastering historical knowledge, interpreting primary documents, and thinking historiographically, but other disciplinary 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 and run through the entire course, we will also return continually to discussions about the broader relevance of Asian American history, as well as ethnic studies and history more generally.

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 thought and dialogue about Asian Americans specifically and race relations more generally; honing skills in critical reading and thinking, working with primary and secondary materials, and writing and oral expression.

REQUIRED TEXTS (Available at Oberlin Bookstore and on reserve at Mudd)

Carlos Bulosan, America is in the Heart: A Personal History (University of Washington Press, 2014)
Shelley Lee, A New History of Asian America (Routledge, 2013)

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%). Attendance and participation are required. Do show your respect for the class by being on time, prepared, and attentive. The attendance portion of your grade will be based on sign up sheets circulated at the beginning of class, so it is your responsibility to sign your name if you were in class. You can clear up to three undocumented absences with a make up assignment (to be arranged with me before or immediately after an absence). Otherwise each unexcused absence will result in a deduction of three points from your final grade. Excessive tardiness and disruptiveness will also negatively affect your grade. 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.

Blackboard posts and pre-discussion (10%). Each day, a small group will start class with a brief conversation about the day’s reading and issues. 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 have signed up, you will post to Blackboard a short paragraph on the reading by 11:00 PM the day before class. Demonstrate
that you thoughtfully considered the materials and can relate them to the course’s broader themes. If there is more than one chapter or essay, begin by characterizing the readings as a whole. Was there a unifying theme? If you read pieces by different authors, did they have different takes on the subject? If you read chapters from a book, what is the argument the author is developing? In addition to these questions, you should feel free to share any other impressions and questions. Others who are also assigned to post that day 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 posts and comments that fail to demonstrate substance, thoughtfulness, and engagement 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%).** You will write a 4-5 page essay discussing current directions in Asian American historical scholarship, focusing on two recent articles or book chapters about a particular topic within the field, an history, published no earlier than 2010. One can be an assigned reading, but the other must be an outside reading. 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.

**Reading and lecture quizzes (30%).** These will test you on reading and lecture content with each constituting 10% of your final grade. The first two will be in class, and the third will be a take-home final exam.

**Group project (20%).** With a group of classmates you will produce and present either a curated exhibit or digital narrative, using Asian American history as your source material. You will work on this throughout the semester and will be required to check in with me three times over the term on your progress and ideas. More details on this assignment will be given in class.

*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 [http://www.oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode/](http://www.oberlin.edu/studentpolicies/honorcode/)

**CLASSROOM RULES AND ETIQUETTE**

While individual students bring their varied backgrounds, we are also a learning community, brought together by a common interest and desire to learn. I understand that course materials may sometimes raise issues that are controversial or evoke strong feelings. Therefore, I ask that everyone commit to
making this classroom a space for people to explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and engage in open and honest debate.

Please do your part to make the classroom environment a productive and welcoming one. 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 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. 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. Although recent studies show that students absorb knowledge more effectively when writing notes by hand and having a laptop open during lectures often inhibits the learning of both the laptop user and students around them, I am not instituting a laptop ban at this time. I do strongly encourage you to take hand notes. If I receive complaints that computers in class are creating a disruptive learning atmosphere, I will have no choice but to implement a ban.

**ACADEMIC INCOMPLETES**
If you find that you will be unable to complete the class for any reason, the College does allow two kinds of incompletes, educational and emergency. To find which applies to you, consult 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

Feb. 2  Introduction and course objectives
Feb. 4  What is Asian American history?
        Reading: Okihiro, “Margin as Mainstream” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 1-3
Feb. 6  Orientalism before Asian America
        Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 1; Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 4-12

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

Feb. 9  Empire and global capitalism
        Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 2; Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 13-16
Feb. 11 Museum visit with Liliana Milkova
        Reading: Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 17-19
        As preparation for our museum visit, peruse the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center website to
        read about some of their recent exhibits in Asian American history. Use this information to think about
        how you might want to approach creating an exhibit. http://apa.si.edu/exhibitions.asp
Feb. 13  Initial encounters
        Reading: Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 20-25

WEEK 3: Labor Under Capitalism

Feb. 16  Asians and U.S. industrial development
        Reading: Lee, Ch. 3; Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 26-30
Feb. 18  Conflict and cooperation in Hawaii
        Reading: Jung, “Symbolic and Physical Violence” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 31-33
Feb. 20  Asian immigrants and the urban economy
        Reading: Lee, “A Life Cooking for Others” (Bb); Bulosan, America is in the Heart, Ch. 34-37

WEEK 4: Community and Family

Feb. 23  Guest speaker Kris Surla (MRC) on excavating Oberlin Asian American histories
        Reading: Lee, Ch. 4
Feb. 25  Obstacles and breakthroughs in family formation
        Reading: Shah, “Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity” (Bb)
Feb. 27  Beyond the ethnic community: multiethnic and multiracial formations
        Readings: Bald, “The Life and Times of a Multiracial Community” (Bb)

WEEK 5: Racism and the Anti-Asian Movements

Mar. 2  The logic and mechanisms of exclusion
        Reading: Lee, Ch. 5
Mar. 4  The globality of anti-Asian politics
        Reading: Lee, The Yellow Peril and Anti-Asian Exclusion in the Americas” (Bb); Chang,
        Circulating Race and Empire “(Bb)
Mar. 6  QUIZ #1
WEEK 6: Response and Resistance

Mar. 9 Legal resistance and activism
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 6
Mar. 11 Homeland nationalism
   Reading: Bald, “Desertion and Sedition” (Bb)
Mar. 13 Guest lecture by Professor Rick Baldoz, Department of Sociology
   Reading: Baldoz, “Comrade Carlos Bulosan” (Bb)
   PAPER #1 DUE

WEEK 7: Second Generation and Modernity

Mar. 16 Asian America in the 1920s and 1930s
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 7; Matsumoto, City Girls, Ch. 1
Mar. 18 Second generation life and culture in the early-mid 20th century
   Reading: Matsumoto, City Girls, Ch. 2-3
Mar. 20 Gender, sexuality, and transgression
   Reading: Wu, “Was Mom Chung a Sister Lesbian?” (Bb)

WEEK 8  SPRING BREAK

WEEK 9: World War II

Mar. 30 The myth of “military necessity”: Revisiting Japanese internment
   Reading: Matsumoto, City Girls, Ch. 4
Apr. 1 Changing fortunes: Chinese, Asian Indians, and Koreans during the War
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 8
Apr. 3 Rebuilding in a new era
   Reading: Matsumoto, City Girls, Ch. 5

WEEK 10: The Cold War

Apr. 6 Cold War liberalism and racial politics
   Reading: Lee, Ch. 9; Choy, Global Families, Introduction – Ch. 2
Apr. 8 New migrations: adoptees, war brides, and others
   Reading: Choy, Global Families, Ch. 3-4
Apr. 10 QUIZ # 2

WEEK 11: Vietnam and Southeast Asian Migration

Apr. 13 The intersections of war and Asian immigration
   Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 10
Apr. 15 The place of Southeast Asians in America
   Reading: Zia, “Reinventing Our Culture,” (Bb); Lipman, “The Face is the Roadmap” (Bb)
Apr. 17 New geographies and challenges
Reading: Tang, “A Gulf Unites Us” (Bb); Kurashige, “Panethnicity and Community Organizing” (Bb)

WEEK 12: Politics and Activism in the 1960s-1970s

Apr. 20 The meanings of “Yellow Power”
    Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 11
Apr. 22 Radical politics and performances
    Reading: Wu, Asian American Women, Radical Orientalism, and the Revisioning of Global Feminism (Bb); Maeda, “Performing Radical Culture” (Bb)
Apr. 24 Asian American Studies and the transformation of U.S. higher education
    Reading: Chan, “‘Revolutionaries’ and ‘Reformers’” and “On Subversion and the Art of Resistance” (Bb)

WEEK 13: The Watershed of 1965

Apr. 27 At the gates again
    Reading: Lee, A New History, Ch. 12
Apr. 29 New formations and identities
    Reading: Choy, Global Families, Ch. 5; Cheng, “The Changs Next Door to the Diazes” (Bb)
May 1 Intra-minority relations and politics
    Reading: Stevenson, “Latasha Harlins, Soon Ja Du, and Joyce Karlin” (Bb); Zia, Out on the Front Lines (Bb)
    PAPER #2 DUE

WEEK 14: Recent History and the Future of Asian America

May 4 Being Asian American in the 21st century
    Reading: Lee, Ch. 13 and epilogue; Yu, “Has Asian American Studies Failed?” (Bb)
May 6 Group project presentations
May 8 Group project presentations

Final exam due Saturday, May 16, 9:00 PM

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