Introduction to Asian/Pacific American Studies

Please note: The course schedule, starting on page 4, is annotated to provide more information and a broader context for the class discussions and class readings during sections of the course. I used grey text box (like this one) to indicate an annotation.

Course Description

In his incendiary introduction to *Aiiieeeee!!* (1974), the playwright and novelist Frank Chin described Asian America as made up of those “Chinese and Japanese Americans, American-born and –raised, who got their China and Japan from the radio, […] from the pushers of white American culture.” Chin’s anthology for Asian American literature did far more than define a literary tradition; he was imagining a racial and politicized community in the U.S., one defined in opposition to white America. This course takes Chin’s declaration and somewhat narrow definition as a point of departure, exploring the ways in which Asian Americans (including communities that Chin never mentions) have constantly interrogated the meanings of both Asian American and American identity. Drawing from scholarship, historical materials, film, television, and other forms of popular culture, we will ask key questions: What are the origins of the term “Asian American,” “Pacific Islander,” and “Asian Pacific American”? In what ways have these terms been inclusive, exclusionary, and/or strategic? How do Asian Americans fit into larger debates about race and immigration? What kind of stereotypes have been constructed about Asian people over the course of American history? How have artists, activists, and ordinary people helped define the stakes of “Asian America”?

By the end of the course, students should expect:

- To have a grasp of the larger debates, historical events, and key themes in the field of Asian/Pacific Islander American Studies.
- To have a strong understanding of the historical processes which have shaped Asian American and Pacific Islander American experience.
- To be able to think comparatively across diasporas, considering the similarities and differences of the diverse histories we organize under “Asian/Pacific American.”

Course Materials

The readings for this course will be available by PDF through Ctools. In addition, two books must be purchased for this course:

- Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*
- Anand Giridharadas, *The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas*

These books can be purchased through an online bookstore (Amazon, Indiebound), and are also available as ebooks (Kindle, Google Ebook). Either version – print or electronic – is fine for use in this class. Please note that we will begin the Zia and Giridharadas readings on November 18, so plan accordingly.
Assignments

There are several different types of assignments for this course.

1) Responses: Roughly every week or so, I will be assigning 500-word responses, which will be due at the beginning of the next class. These assignments are meant for you to engage the current readings, concepts, and a specific prompt. They also provide an opportunity to hone your skills of writing and analysis, and receive feedback (and grades) from me on your writing.

2) Write-Up of Event: For this assignment, you will be required to attend one event (lecture, film, performance) on or near campus that is relevant to Asian/Pacific Islander American studies. (You will be given notice for most of these, but keep your eyes and ears open for others). You will be expected to offer a brief summary of the event in addition to a critical discussion of the event’s relationship to the course readings and discussion. Expected length is approximately 500 words. This assignment can be completed at any point, but must be turned in on or before Friday, December 9.

3) Midterm Exam: There will be an in-class midterm exam, which will feature passage identification and short essays. You will be required to directly engage with the course readings as well as discussions in class. The exam will take place during our class session on October 14.

4) Take-Home Final Exam: Your final assignment for the course will entail a take-home final exam. More details about this exam will be announced closer to the end of the semester.

5) Reading Quizzes: As a way to make sure you’re keeping up with the reading, I will periodically give you short reading quizzes. These will entail short answer responses, and if you have done the reading, these will not be difficult.

Grades

Responses: 25%
Event Write-Up: 5%
Quizzes: 5%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Final Exam: 30%
Participation: 10%

Attendance & Participation

Attendance is mandatory for this course, and an essential part to how the course is designed. The strength of this course will depend on establishing a community of writers, readers, and thinkers who take one another’s work and opinions seriously. In order to do that, you should be fully present, on time, and with all the readings covered.

If you have to miss a class period because of a religious holiday, please let me know in advance and your absence will be excused. Similarly, if you are sick, provide a doctor’s note in order to be excused. If you don’t have official documentation explaining your absence, you will be marked for an unexcused absence. In other words, an email saying you don’t feel well isn’t enough to count as an excused absence.

That said, you are allowed a grand total of two unexcused absences over the course of the semester. So, if for whatever reason – you’re not feeling well but it’s not the sort of thing you can go to UHS for – then you can miss that class. By the third unexcused absence, however, your grade will be negatively affected a half a letter grade (a B+ becomes a B, a B becomes a B-, etc.) If an assignment is due and you know that you will be absent, please make arrangements to submit it early. If you have an unexcused absence during a quiz, you will not be able to make this up.
Plagiarism
The university’s usual standards for academic integrity will be upheld in this course. If you're not familiar with them, please read the guidelines regarding plagiarism posted on the LSA website (http://www.lsa.umich.edu/academicintegrity/), and ask me if you have any questions or concerns. In short, make sure to quote and cite with footnotes any words or ideas that you include in your paper that you first found elsewhere. Be particularly careful to avoid using material from websites without quotation marks and attribution: just like printed sources, texts from websites must be quoted and cited. It’s better to be safe than sorry—an extra citation or two won’t bother anyone, but neglecting to quote or cite properly will lead to serious consequences for your academic career.

Special Circumstances:
Students with special circumstances (disabilities, athletic schedules, etc.) should speak with me as soon as possible so that proper arrangements can be made. Athletes and those involved with student activities that require travel during our meeting time should provide an official copy of your travel schedules with conflicting times highlighted.

Office Hours
I have scheduled my office hours this term between 4-5 on Monday and Wednesday in 3658 Haven Hall. Haven Hall is in the large aggregate of buildings (including Angell Hall, Mason Hall, the “Fishbowl,” etc) on the western edge of the diag. The best way to reach my office is to enter through the doorway facing the diag, and take the elevator to third floor. I’m all the way down the hall.
Office hours are a great chance for us to extend a conversation we had in class, to get some feedback on any assignments you’re working on, or even if you want to discuss any other issues regarding the class. If you can’t make that time, please feel free to email me or talk to me after class to schedule another time to meet.

Sweetland Writing Center:
If you would like more help on your essays beyond classroom workshops or conference during office house, consider going to the Sweetland Writing Center. Sweetland is located at 1310 North Quad on State Street, and you can contact them at sweetlandinfo@umich.edu.
Semester Schedule

Our schedule is subject to change, depending on our pace of reading and writing. If there are any changes, I will let you know in class and through Ctools. The readings should be completed on the day scheduled (i.e., if a reading is listed for Sep. 14, then you should complete it by that date). For space purposes, I did not include full citational information for the readings; I will include that over Ctools.

Annotation: The first day of class, students read a poem titled “Transaction” by Brian Komei Dempster, which weaves together 1) the story of Vincent Chin, the Chinese-American autoworker who was killed by white autoworkers in Detroit in 1983, and 2) the history of Japanese-American internment during World War II. This introduction to the course lays out several key themes that we discuss over the entire semester:

1) The construction of Asian American identity, out of diverse but interconnected communities including Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian communities in the U.S.
2) The long history of Anti-Asian violence in the U.S., by state and non-state actors.

Class #1
Wednesday, September 9
Introductions
- Brian Komei Dempster, “Transaction”
- Curtis Chin, Who Killed Vincent Chin? (Clip)

Between Class #2 and Class #10, students are introduced to Asian American history, drawn largely from Shelley Lee’s A New History of Asian America, which covers the long history of Asian migration to the U.S., beginning with perceptions of Asia in U.S. preceding widespread migration and ending with the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. Students learn about key milestones in Immigration Legislation, including the 1790 Naturalization Act, the 1868 Burlingame Treaty, the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Law, the 1917 Immigration Act (“Asiatic Barred Zone”), the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, and several other key legal cases which shaped immigration and naturalization debates in the U.S. By Class #10, students are familiar with a larger overview of Asian American history, and have been introduced to concepts including Orientalism, the “social construction” and “legal construction” of race, “panethnic” and “racialized” identity, the legal, social, and economic dimensions of anti-Asian racism.

Class #2
Monday, September 14
Asian American Experiences
- Robert Chang, “Introduction: Becoming Asian American”
Class #3
Wednesday, September 16
Orientalism
  • Shelley Lee, “Introduction” and “Chapter 1: Orientalism Before Asian America”
  • Vivek Bald, “American Orientalism”

Class #4
Monday, September 21
Early Migrations
  • Shelley Lee, “Chapter 2: The Asian Diaspora in the Pre-Exclusion Years”
  • Jane Singh, “Gadar Party”

Class #5
Wednesday, September 23
Anti-Asiatic Movements
  • Shelley Lee, “Chapter 5: Racism and the Anti-Asian Movements”
  • Mary Mote, “Poor Ah Toy”

Class #6
Monday, September 28
Understanding the “PI” in APIA
  • Ronald Takaki, “The Sugar Kingdom: The Making of Plantation Hawaii”
  • Vincent Diaz, “To ‘P’ or Not to ‘P?’: Marking the Territory Between Pacific Islander and Asian American Studies”
  • J Kehaulani Kauanui, “Asian American Studies and the ‘Pacific Question’”

Class #7
Wednesday, September 30
Citizenship and Exclusion
  • Ian Haney-Lopez, “Thind and Ozawa”

Class #8
Monday, October 5
Asian Americans and World War II
  • Shelley Lee, “Chapter 8: Asian Americans and Crucible of World War II”
  • Hisaye Yamamoto, “Wilshire Bus”

Class #9
Wednesday, October 7
Asian Americans and 1965 Immigration Act
  • Shelley Lee, “Chapter 12: The Watershed of 1965 and the Remaking of Asian America”
Class #10  
Monday, October 12  
The Model Minority Myth  
• Robert Lee, “The Cold War Construction of the Model Minority Myth”  
• Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, “Racist Love”  
• Video: Scott Kurashige, “On the Yellow Peril & Model Minority,” and “Discusses the Model Minority Image”

Class #11  
Wednesday, October 14  
In-Class Midterm Exam

Between Class #12 and #13, students pick up on some of the themes introduced in Class #10, which explicitly discussed the “model minority” myth and its emergence within the context of anti-Black racism. In Class #12, students discuss Claire Jean-Kim’s formative concept of “Asian American racial triangulation,” which posits that Asian Americans have been racialized American racialization in relation to black-white binary of the US. Drawing on that discussion, students look closely at histories like the 1992 LA Upheavals, and its effect on African American communities and the Korean American community. Students also learn about the longer history of Black and Asian political organizing, and draw connections to recent discussions about the role of Asian Americans in the #Blacklivesmatter campaign.

Monday, October 19: Fall Break / No Class

Class #12  
Wednesday, October 21  
Between Black and White?  
• Film: Sa-i-Gu  
• Claire Jean-Kim, “Racial Triangulation”  
• Ice Cube, “Black Korea”

Class #13  
Monday, October 26  
Black-Asian Solidarities and Fissures  
• Vijay Prashad, “The Forethought: Raw Skin” and “On Antiblack Racism”  
• Anirvan Chatterjee, “Black and Desi: A Shared History”  
• Readings on #Blacklivesmatter and Asian American political organizing

Between Classes #14 and #20, students discuss contemporary issues affecting Asian Americans and Asian American identity. Beginning with a discussion about the role of media stereotypes of Asian Americans and Asian American women, more particularly, this section of the course examines several contemporary controversies, including the “Yi-Fen Chou” controversy of 2015, in which a white-American poet used a Chinese name and was selected for the Best American Poetry collections. We also look how food and foodways pay a central role in Asian American identity and history, and the role of young Asian American activists who are using social media in innovative ways to shape conversations about racism in the US.
Class #14
Wednesday, October 8
Media Stereotypes of Asian Americans
- Robert Lee, “Preface” and “Yellowface”
- Shilpa Dave, Apu’s Brown Voice

Class #15
Monday, November 2
Stereotypes of Asian and Asian American Women
- Film: Slaying the Dragon (Dir. Deborah Gee)
- From Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Hypersexuality of Race

Class #16
Wednesday, November 4
“Yellowface”
- Readings from the “Yi-Fen Chou/Michael Derrick Hudson” controversy
- Nam Le, “Love and Honour and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice”

Class #17
Monday, November 9
Asian American Foodways
- Film: The Search for General Tso (Dir. Ian Cheney)
- Robert Ji-Song Ku, “California Roll”

Class #18
Wednesday, November 11
Asian American Food and Identity
- Anna Shih, “How to Cook Like a Banana”
- Anita Mannur, from Culinary Fictions

Class #19
Monday, November 16
Asian Americans and Digital Culture

Class #20
Wednesday, November 18
Asian Americans and Online Activism
- Readings from The Colbert Report controversy
The last several weeks of this course are focused on two works of non-fiction, which tackle various issues about Asian America. Helen Zia’s *Asian American Dreams* is a memoir, which narrates Zia’s role in the activism that emerged out of the killing of Vincent Chin, as well as other “flash points” that galvanized Asian American communities including the 1992 LA Upheaval and 1998 South Asian Taxi Workers citywide strike. Anand Giridharadas’ *The True American* tells the story of Rais Bhuiyan, a Bangladeshi immigrant in Texas who was shot by Mark Stroman, a white supremacist who went on a killing spree against South Asians in the weeks after 9/11. Bhuiyan eventually was one of the key actors who appealed to the court to save Stroman from the death penalty; Giridharadas’ book not only examines Islamophobia after 9/11, but raises questions about the nature of American identity in the 21st century.

**Class #21**
Monday, November 23

- Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*

**Wednesday, November 25: Thanksgiving**

**Class #22**
Monday, November 30

- Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*

**Class #23**
Wednesday, December 2

- Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*

**Class #24**
Monday, December 7

Asian America after 9/11

- Deepa Iyer, “Not Our American Dream” and “Journeys in a Racial State”
- Anand Giridharadas, *The True American*

**Class #25**
Wednesday, December 9

Asian America after 9/11

- Anand Giridharadas, *The True American*

**Class #26**
Monday, December 14

Asian America after 9/11

- Anand Giridharadas, *The True American*
Take-Home Exam Due December 18