

AMST 520: Readings in Asian American Studies

W 2-4:50pm; VKC 259

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In the course catalogue, this is described as a graduate seminar covering critical themes in the interdisciplinary field of Asian American Studies, including perspectives from anthropology, literature, sociology, history, political science, religious studies, cultural studies, women/gender studies and psychology. This particular iteration of the course will focus on key developments in all these areas of Asian American studies after 1995, except for psychology, and although there is considerable emphasis on literary studies, over half of the authors represented come from other disciplines. In 1995, *Amerasia Journal* published a special issue explicitly calling for a higher degree of theorization in the field. The past decade has shown that the field responded prolifically. The course will focus on how these recent theoretical innovations both sharpen our ability to study Asian Americans even as the place and function of Asian Americans in American society is put into question.

The course will require students to work on a variety of skills useful for the academic profession. There are three requirements: a seminar discussion, a book review, and a research paper.

In the seminar discussion, you will be responsible for an hour of the class, during which you will present on the book being covered for about 20 minutes and lead discussion for the remaining time. 20 minutes is the usual length of a conference talk, so the intent is to give you some practice at giving conference papers. The presentation should clarify the key themes and arguments of the work in question; connect them to the themes and concerns of the course, both in terms of our selected material and the way our discussions have evolved; and have some type of argument about the text and the work that it does. Besides that, how you present the work and how you structure the discussion is up to you; you can be straightforward or you can be more creative.

The book review, which should run about 1000 words, will discuss a text for which you are not leading the discussion. 1000 words is the usual length for a short academic review. For examples of such reviews, please consult *Amerasia Journal*, the *Journal of Asian American Studies*, or the major journals within your own discipline. Book reviews are a relatively easy but important way for you to participate in a public academic conversation. While they all involve summarizing and contextualizing the book, the crucial issue, especially for graduate students, is the stance you will take toward the work, and the tone you will adopt. Book reviews are due two weeks after the week we discuss the book. As with the seminar, you must sign up for a book review.

The research paper will be at least ten pages and is due at the end of the semester. Ten pages is the approximate length for a 20-minute conference presentation, so again, the intent is to give you an opportunity to write something potentially useful to you outside of the seminar. The focus is on quality instead of quantity, so instead of having you worry about writing a great deal, I expect you to spend more energy on conducting extensive research and mastering the ability to condense that research and appropriate it for your own uses. While the topic of the paper is completely up to you, you should discuss the topic first with me, sometime during week 7 or 8. You can pursue a problem or question that leads you to texts or issues not dealt with in class, or you can focus your work on the texts we have read. The only requirement for the topic is that it should directly address a problem or question that concerns one or more Asian American communities, which can be broadly defined to include diasporic and transnational populations.

* asterisks denote weeks that are not available for student-led discussions

Constructions of Race, Gender and Nation

*Week 1/ August 24

Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*; Viet Nguyen, introduction and conclusion, *Race and Resistance*

recommended: Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*

Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (film)

Theresa Cha, *Dictee* (avant-garde text)

*Week 2/ August 31

David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*

Recommended: José E. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States and the Erotics of Culture*; José David Saldívar, *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*

Jessica Hagedorn, *Dogeaters* (novel)

Ang Lee, *The Wedding Banquet* (film)

Week 3/ September 7

Laura Hyun-yi Kang, *Compositional Subjects*

Recommended: Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior* (creative nonfiction)

Grace Lee, *The Grace Lee Project* (film)

Week 4/ September 14

Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals*

Recommended: Robert G. Lee, *Orientals*

George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*

Don Lee, *Yellow* (short stories)

Wayne Wang, *Chan is Missing* (film)

Week 5/ September 21

Vincent Cheng, *Inauthentic* (this book will be ordered by me)
Kandice Chuh, excerpts from *imagine otherwise*
Recommended: Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race*
Adrian Tomine, *Summer Blonde* and *Optic Nerve #9* (graphic fiction)
Gail Dolgin and Vicente Franco, *Daughter from Da Nang* (film)

Immigrants, Refugees and the Diaspora

Week 6/ September 28

Aihwa Ong, *Buddha is Hiding*
Recommended: Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*
Spencer Nakasako and Sokly Ny, *a.k.a. Don Bonus* and other Nakasako films
le thi diem thuy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (novel)

Week 7/ October 5

Catherine Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History*
Recommended: Rhacel Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*
Marlo Poras, *Mai's America* (film)
Han Ong, *Fixer Chao* (novel)

- **Please make an appointment with me in either week 7 or 8 to discuss your research paper.** Come prepared with some ideas about the area you want to research, the texts you wish to use, an argument you think you will be offering or a hypothesis you will be testing.
- **The syllabus after this date is subject to change.** There's a good chance I'll be having surgery sometime in October or November, and will require two weeks of guest lecturers. Depending on the surgery time and the availability of the lecturers, the syllabus may be altered in terms of scheduling, but not in terms of the texts themselves. Please be flexible.

Week 8/ October 12

Amitava Kumar, *Bombay London New York*
Sau-ling Cynthia Wong, "Denationalization Reconsidered"
Susan Koshy, "The Fiction of Asian American Literature"
Recommended: Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*; Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora*
Akhil Sharma, *An Obedient Father* (novel)
Vivek Bald, *Taxi-Vala* (film)

Gender and Sexuality

Week 9/ October 19

Susan Koshy, *Sexual Naturalization*
Recommended: Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*
Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student* (novel)

Meera Nair, *Mississippi Masala* (film)

Week 10/ October 26

Martin Manalansan, *Global Divas*

David Eng, introduction to *Racial Castration*

Recommended: Jose Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*

The films of Gregg Araki and the videos of Nguyen Tan Hoang

Week 11/ November 2

Celine Parreñas Shimizu, *The Hypersexuality of Race* (text may be subject to change, as it has not yet been published; possible guest appearance by Shimizu)

Popular Culture: Youth and Religion

Week 12/ November 9

Sunaina Maira, *Desis in the House*

Recommended: George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*; and *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism, and the Poetics of Place*

Justin Lee, *Better Luck Tomorrow* (film)

Brian Ascalon Roley, *American Son* (novel)

*Week 13/ November 16 (Jane Iwamura will guest lecture)

Jane Iwamura, ed., *Revealing the Sacred in Asian and Pacific America*

Rudy Busto, "The Gospel According to the Model Minority"

Recommended: Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*; an Asian American novel would be Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine*; films, likewise, would be the ones written by Kureishi or based on his stories, especially *My Son, the Fanatic*

Politics, Capitalism, Class Conflict

*Week 14/ November 23 (Janelle Wong will guest lecture in a short class)

Claire Jean Kim, *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*

selections from Gordon Chang, ed. *Asian Americans and Politics*

Recommended: Chang-Rae Lee, *Native Speaker* (novel)

Spike Lee?

Week 15/ November 30

Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and her essay "Ethics After Idealism"

Recommended: Michael Denning, *The Culture Front*

Gish Jen, *Typical American* (novel)

Wayne Wang, *The Joy Luck Club* (film)

Other recommended works:

Raymond Williams, *Keywords*

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 2nd edition

John Carlos Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies*

Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan, *The Futures of American Studies*

Min Zhou and James Gatewood, *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*

Min Song and Jean Wu, *Asian American Studies*

Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*