

ASIAN AMERICA: VIOLENCE AND THE HORIZONS OF CROSS-ETHNIC SOLIDARITY

PROFESSOR: RYAN CANLAS

This course will address one single theoretical, political, social, and pedagogical question: to what extent is an ethnic and racial identity like the Asian American both stable *and* subject to erosion, critique, and regrounding? Adopting a more specific and perhaps even partisan approach, one can pose this question in the following, two-fold way: a) what kinds of limitations arise when one establishes a social and political identity through ethnicity and race, and b) what are the possibilities that this form of identification simultaneously opens up? In the context of this course's overarching rubric—Asian American Studies—we will ask these questions and what they mean and have meant to Asian American activism, whether theoretical and speculative or real and historical, and its politicization beyond and within the boundaries of ethnicity, race, class, and even nation.

We will begin this course by looking at the Japanese American internment during the second world war. How does racialization operate alongside, through, and across the State's creation of citizens and subjects? Identity and identification, the police, the State, and the legalistic, rights-based definition of "the American" (along with its many "subcategories") are just some of the interrelated topics and problems that will guide this course's overall trajectory, moving as we will from World War II to the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the confluences of the kinds of Asian American and African American political activism and militancy witnessed between the likes of the Red Guard Party and the Black Panther Party, and the problems and potential and perhaps latent forces at work in more contemporary struggles over the social, economic, and political inequalities that beset American "minorities" today. How do the suspension of rights and the dispensation, protection, and defense of liberties combine with racialization to produce the citizen and subject? What kinds of power relations come into play, and what does it mean to adopt an ethnically-based subjectivity as a means for resisting and creating change?

As we read and analyze a number of literary and artistic works and historical and theoretical writings we will also be asking what role pedagogy plays in *thinking through* the question of Asian American identities and political activism. What role do the university and the classroom play when they adopt, as has the program through which this class is being offered, i.e. Asian American Studies, the paradigm of ethnicity as the basis for teaching and learning about subjects and the problem of social and political subjectivities? What kinds of places are the university and the classroom for theorizing political activism? What is, essentially, the politics of reading? What does it mean and what are the stakes involved in circumscribing a series of texts through not only the framework of Asian American Studies, but through the political framework within which the aforementioned topics and questions are possible as well?

This course, then, will be devoted to thinking of Asian American culture and artistic production as inseparable instances of a much greater set of social, political, and economic forces. In so doing, we will also reflect upon the university and the classroom as sites where such a thought can potentially ground or serve as an analogue to a practice that extends beyond the invisible walls of academia itself.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Attendance and Participation: 15%

10-minute presentation: 15%

Mid-semester paper (7 – 10 pages): 30%

Final paper (10 – 15 pages): 40%

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Course Reader
 - Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. *Dictee*
 - Angela Davis. *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*
 - Sesshu Foster. *Atomik Aztex*
 - Jessica Hagedorn. *Dream Jungle*
 - Joy Kogawa. *Obasan*
 - John Okada. *No-No Boy*
 - Richard Wright. *Black Power: Three Books From Exile: Black Power; The Color Curtain; White Man, Listen!*
 - Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood, eds. *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*
- *All texts are available at the campus store

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

THE HISTORY OF ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES: WHOSE/WHO'S THIRD WORLD?

- Robert G. Lee. “The Cold War Construction of the Model Minority Myth” in Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood, eds., *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader*.
- Glenn Omatsu. “The ‘Four Prisons’ and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s.” *ibid*.
- Karen Umemoto. “‘On Strike!’: San Francisco State College Strike, 1968 – 1969: The Role of Asian American Students.” *ibid*.

WEEK 2

RACISM, VIOLENCE, AND THE STATE

- Angela Davis. *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*.
- Michel Foucault. “14 January 1976,” “10 March 1976,” and “17 March 1976” in “*Society Must Be Defended*” (in Course Reader).

WEEKS 3, 4 & 5

THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT: POLITICAL SOVEREIGNTY AND THE MECHANISMS OF POWER

- Joy Kogawa. *Obasan*.
- John Okada. *No-No Boy*.

WEEKS 6 & 7

WAR AND LANGUAGE: RESISTANCE AND LITERARY SUBJECTIVITY

- Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. *Dictee*.
- Lisa Lowe. “The Subject of *Dictee*” (in Course Reader).

WEEKS 7 & 8

APOCALYPSE NOW: SOUTHEAST ASIA, CONQUEST, GUERRILLA WARFARE, AND POPULAR CULTURE

- Jessica Hagedorn. *Dream Jungle*.
- Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper. *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*.

- Jean Baudrillard. “We Are All Tasaday” from *Simulacra and Simulation* (in Course Reader).
—Michael Foucault. “3 March 1976” in “*Society Must Be Defended*” (in Course Reader).

WEEKS 9 & 10

THE FORCE OF IDENTIFICATION: READING, BIOGRAPHY, AND THE RIGHT TO HISTORY

- Sesshu Foster. *Atomik Aztex*.
—Laura Pulido. Chapters from *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*.

WEEKS 11, 12 & 13

A) SELF-DEFENSE, THE RETURN OF THE THIRD WORLD, AND THE EROSION OF NATIONAL BOUNDARIES B) REPRISAL: ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES, STUDENT ACTIVISM, AND THE “IDENTITY” OF THE THIRD WORLD

- Fred Ho. *Black Panther Suite: All Power to the People*.
—Fred Ho. “Kickin’ the White Man’s Ass: Black Power, Aesthetics, and the Asian Martial Arts” from *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (in Course Reader).
—Claire Jean Kim and Taeku Lee. “Interracial Politics: Asian Americans and Other Communities of Color” in Zhou and Gatewood.
—Daryl J. Maeda. “Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen: Constructing Asian American Identity through Performing Blackness, 1969 – 1972” in Zhou and Gatewood.
—Vijay Prashad. “Kung Fusion: Organize the ‘Hood Under I-Ching Banners” from *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* (in Course Reader).
—Vijay Prashad. “Foreword: ‘Bandung is Done’—Passages in AfroAsian Epistemology” from *AfroAsian Encounters* (in Course Reader).
—Vijay Prashad. “Introduction,” “Bandung,” and “Conclusion” from *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (in Course Reader)
—Leti Volpp. “‘Obnoxious to Their Very Nature:’ Asian Americans and Constitutional Citizenship” in Zhou and Gatewood.
—Richard Wright. *The Color Curtain in Black Power!*

Revisit:

- Glenn Omatsu. “The ‘Four Prisons’ and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism from the 1960s to the 1990s.” *ibid*.
—Karen Umemoto. “‘On Strike!’: San Francisco State College Strike, 1968 – 1969: The Role of Asian American Students.” *ibid*.