The Politics and Poetics of (Not-)Belonging

Globalization, Identity and Culture: Asian-American Experience in the 21st Century *
(CORE 120: Fall 2021)

Classroom: Howard 245
Time: Mon/Wed/Fri 1:50-2:50pm
Office: Howard 371
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Office Hours: Mon/Wed 3-4pm
(and by appointment)

Description
This course engages Asian-American experience as way to open up new approaches to studying contemporary culture. We explore broad concepts such as identity, globalization, gender, education, and racial perception with a hybrid approach that intentionally crosses boundaries of history, literature, sociology, anthropology and media studies. Class material will include fiction, memoir, film, art, social media and material objects in addition to more conventional academic studies. The course includes some background history, but is focussed on contemporary life experiences. Students are encouraged to use theoretical concepts and methodological approaches inspired by Asian American studies, but urged to work on specific topics of personal interest to them (that is, essays do not need to focus on Asian American topics and no background is expected!).

Our semester is loosely divided into four sections. Each section will focus on connecting a different conceptual modality to concrete observations and include a written assignment. (1) A brief historical overview will introduce alternative ways of approaching politics, knowledge and national representation. Students will interrogate national history by tracing specific family timelines. (2) An urban studies approach guides the next section on the production of social and material spaces. Students will choose a particular place to focus their own inquiry. (3) In this section we take a culture/media studies approach towards the representation of body, race and sexuality. Students will concentrate on their own choice of films, television or social media productions for the essay. (4) The last thematic section focuses on biographical and fictional literature. In addition to reading texts together, students are encouraged to review a fictional piece of their own choice and/or create personal narratives.

Each section will be accompanied by informal class discussion and peer-review of the topics and theories selected by students. Finally, students may revise, expand and combine any of the earlier essays or create an entirely new project for their final paper and formal presentation.

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Learning Objectives
- Examine explicit ideas and hidden assumptions embedded in texts and media productions with an open yet critical mind.
- Consider alternative perspectives when considering texts, media, events and people.
- Appreciate the shared and contested questions associated with “Asian-American” identity, representation, and scholarship.
- Use these questions to explore new ways of approaching and presenting our own observations, experiences and learning.
- Present clear, compelling and effective analysis of personal observations, experiences and media productions as well as texts supported by relevant information.
- Do not take categories for granted!

Expectations & Evaluation
Participation 25%: This is a seminar, and the success of the class depends upon student participation. Critical and thoughtful discussion with your peers will be as constructive as interaction with the instructor. You will be expected to (a) attend all classes; (b) do all the assigned readings prior to class sessions; (c) take active part in all class discussions and exercises; (d) share and discuss your own writing with classmates for peer review in and out of formal classes.

Reading posts 15%: There will be weekly written Moodle posts throughout the semester. These are short, informal, submissions linking the general reading to a “keyword” from our course text or another term of your choosing. This exercise is designed to: (a) help you think about the reading; (b) experiment with the process of abstraction; (c) introduce your ideas to class discussion. These posts will not be graded on an individual basis, but thoughtful submissions are required for participation in the course.

Essays 60%: Four relatively short, but formal, essays will address different subject matter in each section of the course. A final essay may be based upon revision and/or combination of your earlier writing, or address an entirely new theme (FIVE papers total). The broad framework for each section and related essays follow. More precise guidelines will be provided as the semester proceeds. You will receive feedback (and grades if desired) for these essays and will be expected to take comments into consideration for further writing in the class.

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Class structure

Section I) History: Although the focus of this class is not historical; we will spend the first couple weeks learning the background of Asian American studies. We will discuss different ways of conceptualizing the past and narrating history. Students will write brief personal histories that places themselves in this particular moment of the L&C classroom. (~2 pages)

Section II) Space: Like time, space is often taken for granted. This section looks at the socio-economic construction of multi-ethnic Asian spaces in American suburbs. Students will choose a particular place to investigate as the focus for their own short essay. (~4 pages)

Section III) Images: Again, we approach a concept that is widely assumed and consumed but less commonly articulated. Questions of race, appearance and sexuality in popular culture (social media, TV and films) guide our reading and conversations. Students will be encouraged to explore a specific topic of personal significance to them for this culture-studies essay. (~4 pages)

Section IV) Stories: The last section of the semester focuses on literature produced by Asian Americans. In particular, we will concentrate on auto-biographical fiction and essays as socio-cultural expression. The class will read shared texts, but students are will also explore individual reading as the focus for a critical essay. (~4 pages)

Conclusion: Each of the preceding sections emphasize the use of particular theoretical concepts, or “keywords”, in the analysis of time, space, image and story. For the final paper students may revise, expand, combine or supplement any of their previous essays into a more rigorous and comprehensive paper and presentation focusing on a primary concept and topic of their choice. (~6 pages)

Class Texts
Cathy Park Hong 2020 Minor Feelings
Madeline Y. Hsu 2017 Asian American History: A Very Short Introduction
Maxine Hong Kingston Woman Warrior
Willow S. Lung-Amam 2017 Trespassers? Asian Americans and the Battle for Suburbia
L. Ayu Saraswati 2021 Pain Generation: Social Media, Feminist Activism, and the Neoliberal State
Cathy Schlund-Vials et al (eds) 2015 Keywords for Asian American Studies [online reference only]

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Classroom etiquette

- You are expected to attend and participate in every class meeting. I also expect you to take responsibility for maintaining pace with the class if/when absence is unavoidable (i.e. check Moodle and contact classmates for notes; ask me if clarification is needed). More than three absences will effect your grade unless you make arrangements for alternative work.

- This class is all about engaging diverse and even conflicting views. Please treat your colleagues, myself and the subject matter with respect. But alternative views (aka disagreement) are especially valued; so please offer whenever possible!

- Please turn off/silence/remove electronic devices while attending class. Discussion with classmates provides primary material for the course; so you should take notes during class sessions. Please talk with me directly if you need to use a device other than pen and paper for this.

- Plagiarism or other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are unsure of guidelines, please check the College ‘Academic Integrity Policy’ or ask me directly.

- I encourage you to approach me with any questions or concerns related to the course. Similarly, if you have any personal considerations, suggestions or accommodations please speak with me directly in addition to the office of ‘Student Support Services’.

- You are always welcome to catch me at the end of class and/or drop-in to office hours immediately after on Monday and Wednesday. Please email me with any concerns and/or to arrange meeting at other times.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE*

Part I - History

Week 1 (30 Aug, 1, 3 Sept)
Mon: Class introduction
Wed: Cathy Park Hong 2020 Minor Feelings - United
Keywords - ‘Identity’ (Ho)
Fri: Kwame Anthony Appiah The Lies That Bind - chapt 1) Classification

Week 2 (6, 8, 10 Sept)
Mon: LABOR DAY (no class)
Wed: Madeline Hsu Asian American History - chapt 1) Empires and migration
- Keywords - Race (Rana)
Fri: Hsu Asian American History - 2) Race and the American republic
- Keywords - Nationalism (Kim)

Week 3 (13, 15, 17 Sept)
Mon: Hsu Asian American History - 3) Living in the margins
- Keywords - Exclusion (Robinson)
Wed: Hsu Asian American History - 4) Crucibles of war
- Keywords - War (Wong)
Fri: Hsu Asian American History - 5) Imperialism, immigration and capitalism
- Please come prepared to discuss your own ‘American’ history
[1st essay - Personal Histories]

Part II - Space

Week 4 (20, 22, 24 Sept)
Mon: Willow S. Lung-Amam Trespassers? - Introduction
Fri: Jeff Chang We Gon’ Be Alright - Vanilla Cities and their Chocolate Suburbs

Week 5 (27, 29 Sept, 1 Oct)
Mon: Lung-Amam Trespassers? - chapt 2) A Quality Education for Whom?
Wed: Claude Steele Whistling Vivaldi - chapt 2) A Mysterious Link Between Identity and Intellectual Performance
Fri: Lung-Amam Trespassers? - chapt 3) Mainstreaming the Asian Mall

Week 6 (4, 6, 8 Oct)

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Mon: Lung-Amam *Trespassers?* - chapt 4) That “Monster House” Is My Home
Wed: Sara Ahmed *Queer Phenomenology* - Introduction
Fri: FALL BREAK (no class)

**Week 7 (11, 13, 15 Oct)**
Mon: Lung-Amam *Trespassers?* - chapt 5) Charting New Suburban Storylines; Afterword; Appendix
Wed: Gloria Anzaldúa - La Conciencia de la Mestiza: Towards a New Consciousness
Fri: Peer review session

[2nd essay - Spatial Descriptions]

*Part III - Images*

**Week 8 (18, 20, 22 Oct)**
Mon: L. Ayu Saraswati *Pain Generation* - chapt 1) The Neoliberal Self(ie)
Wed: FILM (to be decided)
  - Thessaly La Force *New York Times: The Style Magazine* - Why Do Asian-American Remain Largely Unseen in Film and Television?
Fri: Saraswati *Pain Generation* - chapt 2) Making Gold Out of It

**Week 9 (25, 27, 29 Oct)**
Mon: Saraswati *Pain Generation* - chapt 3) Masking Pain, Unmasking Race
Wed: Elizabeth Chin *My Life with Things* - My White Man’s Tooth; Should I Be Straighter & Making Roots/Routes
Fri: Saraswati *Pain Generation* - chapt 4) Silence as Testimony

**Week 10 (1, 3, 5 Nov)**
Mon: Saraswati *Pain Generation* - chapt 5) What Else Might Be Possible?
Wed: TV Show or Game (to be decided)
  - Tara Fickle *The Race Card* - Introduction: Ludo-Orientalism and Gamification of Race
Fri: Saraswati *Pain Generation* - Coda
Peer review session

[3rd essay - Representations]

*Part IV - Stories*

**Week 11 (8, 10, 12 Nov)**
Mon: Maxine Hong Kingston *Woman Warrior* - No Name Woman & White Tigers
Wed: Kingston *Woman Warrior* - Shaman & At the Western Palace
Fri: ETHNIC STUDIES SYMPOSIUM (Participation Required)

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Week 12 (15, 17, 19 Nov)
Mon: Jacey Fortin New York Times - Critical Race Theory: A Brief History
   - discuss Ray Warren Symposium events
Wed: Jill Parrot Rhetorica - Power and Discourse: Silence as Rhetorical Choice in
     Kingston’s The Woman Warrior
Fri: Kingston Woman Warrior - A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe

Week 13 (22, 24, 26 Nov)
Mon: Thi Bui The Best We Could - (selections)
   - Bui San Francisco Library Interview (1hr YouTube video)
Wed: Hong ‘Stand Up’ & ‘The End of White Innocence’
Fri: THANKSGIVING BREAK (no class)
   [4th essay - Narratives]

Week 14 (29 Nov, 1, 3 Dec)
Mon: Hong ‘Bad English’ & An Education
Wed: Stephen Murphy-Shegematso When Half is Whole (selections)
Fri: Hong ‘Portrait of an Artist’ & ‘The Indebted’

Week 15 (6, 8, 10 Dec)
Mon: peer-review workshop
Wed: Student presentations
Fri: READING DAY (no class)

Saturday, 11 Dec. 1-4pm - Student Presentations
[Final paper]

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