

## Asian American Politics and Contemporary Issues Syllabus (Spring 2022)

Professor Diane Wong

E-mail: [dw633@rutgers.edu](mailto:dw633@rutgers.edu)

What does the growing population of Asian Americans mean for the landscape of American politics? What are the contours of Asian American political consciousness and movement? This course investigates Asian American political participation around contemporary issues such as immigration, multiracial coalitions, affirmative action, data disaggregation, detention and deportation, environmental justice, gentrification, and more. This course will explore the political developments that gave rise to the term “Asian America” in the 1960s and probe deeper theoretical questions about the complexities and pluralities of the contemporary Asian American experience. We will also consider the role of American political institutions including the federal, state, and local governments, and how public policies at all levels come to shape the political lives of Asian Americans in the United States. Texts include Claire Jean Kim’s *Bitter Fruit: The Politics of Black-Korean Conflict in New York City*, Eric Tang’s *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto*, Thi Bui’s *The Best We Could Do*, and Monisha Das Gupta’s *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics*. As we read these texts, students will be exposed to intersectional, comparative, and emergent approaches to the study of race, culture, power, and politics.

The course has four main objectives: 1) to create space for students to think critically about past and contemporary issues that face East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Pacific Islander diasporic communities 2) to provide a comprehensive overview of Asian American involvement in politics and to investigate the role of race in American political thought development 3) to familiarize students with key concepts and terminologies in American politics from multiple disciplines including but not limited to political science, ethnic studies, history, anthropology, geography, and literature 4) to have students learn about diverse research methods including qualitative, quantitative, experimental, and community-oriented research and how to produce academic research that extends beyond the campus audience.

### Course Requirements

**Attendance:** This seminar is designed to be participatory and collaborative in nature, attendance is necessary for you to understand the course material. I ask for regular attendance, if you are unable to attend due to illness or an emergency you should notify me over email before class begins.

**Readings:** Make sure that you have access to the required texts online or in print, it is expected that you will complete all assigned reading before class. Keep in mind that our syllabus is a living document, with future readings and content updated regularly based on our conversations together and also what unfolds in the world around us. For accessibility, most of our readings are accessible via Rutgers libraries or can be found under the files tab on Canvas.

**Participation:** I expect that you will come to class prepared to share, reflect, and challenge each other in a respectful manner. Be prepared to discuss the readings assigned for each week, actively engaging

the course materials will help make our seminar more interesting and relevant for everyone. Part of participation will involve your facilitation of one class discussion.

Office hours: My office hours are virtual and on Friday mornings from 10 am-12pm, use the recurring zoom link sent via email to join office hours.

### **Assignment Overview:**

Weekly Memos: You are required to write weekly memos about the readings to be uploaded in our shared One Drive folder **by 6 pm on Monday night**. Each memo should be one single spaced page and engage with at least two of the week's readings. The purpose of these memos is not to summarize the texts but to become more comfortable in articulating your own thoughts, critiques, contradictions, or original arguments that stem from the readings. The goal is to develop a consistent practice of writing that improves our substantive, methodological, theoretical, and practical understanding of the readings covered each week.

Facilitating Discussions: Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to facilitate one class discussion for thirty minutes. I will share a sign up sheet the second week of class. In addition to coming up with a list of guiding questions for everyone to discuss, facilitators are responsible for incorporating multimedia materials beyond written texts to supplement our readings for the week, for instance short films, exhibits, photographs, audio interviews, songs or mixtapes, which we will view together in class and then discuss.

Oral History Project: We spend the first weeks learning about how race, racialization, and the production of racial difference come to shape our own experiences and relationships to American politics. In a series of collaborative brainstorming sessions, each of you will be asked to identify a family member or chosen family to conduct an oral history interview with. Throughout this process, I ask that you consider these questions: How can narrative work facilitate dialogue around issues of racial inequality and social change? How can oral histories inform our thinking about the policies, practices, procedures, institutions, and systems that uphold racial difference? What are ethical ways to conduct oral histories, especially when it comes to processing grief and trauma? What are specific ways in which oral histories and memory work can build community power? Your oral history interview transcript is **due on Tuesday, March 8**, upload it to our shared folder. Rather than a traditional paper, you will annotate an interview transcript of your choice and write a three page single spaced reflection of the process that will be **due on Tuesday, March 22**. As you annotate the transcript and write in the margins, you should bring into context at least three readings that we have read together in class.

Family History Zine: There are many different ways to record and tell our histories — through oral interviews, photographs, shared meals, rituals, and much more. For this assignment you will create a zine that explores various themes in Asian American politics as we have discussed in class through a particular family recipe. There are several steps to this project. The first step is to go back in time, record the smells, sounds, sights, and memories that come out of the kitchen for this particular recipe. The second is to reach out to your family or chosen family, call them to ask them about the dish and have them tell you stories that are linked to the recipe: where they learned to make the recipe, how cooking the dish has changed over time, where they go to buy the ingredients, what

memories they associate with the flavors, etc. The third is to visualize what is shared. What are the broader themes in Asian American politics and history that this recipe reveals? The zine can incorporate a variety of other mixed media including text from your conversations, drawings, photographs, poetry, magazines, etc. Your final project will be the production of a zine and a three single spaced page artist statement that engages the zine in relation to several of our readings covered in class. **The zine is due on Tuesday, April 26.**

Reflection: Instead of a final memo, each of you will be asked to write a one page reflection **due before class on Tuesday, May 3.** The reflection will provide a chance for you to reflect on our semester together. What were some of the most important lessons gained from our course materials and conversations? How would you describe your personal growth this semester? How will the knowledge gained from this course support your goals and visions for the future? There is no right way to write a reflection so long as it include your own thoughts and visions inspired by our conversations.

### **Grading Policy**

Participation.....	30%
Weekly Memo.....	20%
Oral History Project.....	20%
Family History Zine.....	20%
Reflection.....	10%

### **Other Course Information**

Email Policy: Feel free to email me with questions, I will check my email more frequently during the week and before assignments are due. Please do not wait until the last minute.

Electronic Devices: The success of our seminar rests on active participation and mutual respect for the space we build together. During class, I expect that you will abstain from sending emails and doing other work on your devices.

### **Campus Resources**

Students with Disabilities: Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities, Rutgers is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students, and welcomes students with disabilities into all the University's educational programs. The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. More information can be found at [www.ods.rutgers.edu](http://www.ods.rutgers.edu). You can contact ODS at (848)445-6800 or via email at [dsoffice@echo.rutgers.edu](mailto:dsoffice@echo.rutgers.edu).

Statement of Nondiscrimination: Rutgers enforces non-discrimination and anti-harassment policy and complaint procedures at all levels in order to create an environment free from discrimination, harassment, retaliation and sexual assault. Discrimination or harassment based on race, religion,

gender and/or gender identity or expression, religion, age, national origin, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital status, citizenship status, or on any other legally prohibited basis is unlawful and will not be tolerated.

## **Academic Integrity**

At Rutgers you belong to a community of scholars and practitioners who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. A few examples of behaviors that would compromise academic integrity include plagiarism, recycling coursework, illicit collaboration, or cheating. Plagiarism means knowingly misrepresenting someone else's work as your own. This includes buying a paper off the internet, as well as appropriating another author's words or ideas without proper citation. More information:

<http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu>.

## **Course Schedule**

### **Week 1: Introductions**

Tuesday, January 18

— Introductions

### **Week 2: When and where I enter.**

Tuesday, January 25

- Gary Okihiro (1994) *Margins and Mainstreams*, “Family Album History” and “Is Yellow Black or White”
- Ronald Takaki (1989) *Strangers From a Different Shore*, “A Different Shore”
- Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) *Racial Formation in the United States*, “The Theory of Racial Formation”
- Claire Jean Kim (1999) “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” in *Politics and Society*

### **Week 3: Entanglements of race and empire.**

Tuesday, February 1

- Lisa Yun (2008) *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African slaves in Cuba*, “Historical Context of Coolie Traffic to the Americas”
- Tao Leigh Goffe (2019) “Guano in Their Destiny: Race, Geology, and a Philosophy of Indenture,” in *Amerasia Journal*
- Vivek Bald (2015) *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*, “Bengali Harlem” and “Life and Times of a Multiracial Community”

- Thora Siemsen (2018) “[On Working with Archives: An Interview with writer Saidiya Hartman](#),” published in The Creative Independent
- Alessandro Portelli (1998) *The Oral History Reader*, edited by Alistair Thomson and Robert Perks, “What Makes Oral History Different”

#### **Week 4: War and the refugee condition.**

Tuesday, February 8

- Warsan Shire (2015) “[Home](#)”
- Thi Bui (2017) *The Best We Could Do*
- Eric Tang (2015) *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*, “Introduction: Refugee in the Hyperghetto” and “War/Time”
- Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) “Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving?” in *American Anthropologist*
- Sady Sullivan with Maggie Schreiner (2018) “[If You’re Thinking About Starting An Oral History Project](#),” in *The City Amplified*

#### **Week 5: The dialectic of yellow peril and model minority.**

Tuesday, February 15

- Gary Okihiro (1994) *Margins and Mainstreams: Asians in American History and Culture*, “Perils of the Body and Mind”
- Yuko Kawai (2006) “Stereotyping Asian Americans: The Dialectic of the Model Minority and the Yellow Peril,” in *Howard Journal of Communications*
- Helen Zia (2000) *Asian American Dreams*, “Detroit Blues: “Because of You Motherfuckers”
- Mari J. Matsuda (1996) *Where Is Your Body*, “We Will Not Be Used: Are Asian Americans the Racial Bourgeoisie?”
- Turner Willman, Jason Oliver Chang, Bianca Nozaki-Nasser, Laura Li (2020) *Unmasking Yellow Peril* zine
- Soya Jung (2014) “What a Model Minority Mutiny Demands,” in *RaceFiles*

#### **Week 6: The making of Asian America.**

Tuesday, February 22

- Glenn Omatsu (2000) *Asian American Studies Reader*, “The “Four Prisons” and the Movements of Liberation: Asian American Activism 1960s -1990s”
- Jaeah J. Lee (2018) “[The Forgotten Zine of 1960s Asian American Radicals](#)” in Off Topic
- Estella Habal (2016) *San Francisco’s International Hotel: Mobilizing the Filipino Community in the Anti-Eviction Movement* “Manilatown, Manongs, and the Student Radicals”
- Daryl Joji Maeda (2009) *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* “Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen”

- Monami Maulik (2011) “Our Movement Is for the Long Haul: Ten Years of DRUM’s Community Organizing by Working-Class South Asian Migrants,” in *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts*

### **Week 7: Mapping a politics from below.**

Tuesday, March 1

- bell hooks (1990) *yearning, race, gender and cultural politics*, “choosing the margin as a space for radical openness”
- Robin D.G. Kelley (1993) “We Are Not What We Seem: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in Jim Crow South,” in *Journal of American History*
- Cathy Cohen (2004) “Deviance as Resistance,” in *DuBois Review*
- Eric Tang (2015) *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*, “Housed in the Hyperghetto” and “Welfare Resistance”
- Linda Shopes (2002) “Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities,” in *Journal of American History*

### **Week 8: Asian American cultural politics.**

Tuesday, March 8

- Yusef Omowale (2018) [We Already Are](#), on Medium
- Lisa Lowe (1998) “Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural Politics” in *Journal of Asian American Studies*
- Loan Dao (2019) “Refugee Representations: Southeast Asian American Youth, Hip Hop, and Immigrant Rights,” in *Amerasia Journal*
- Rachel Kuo, (2018) “[Building an Asian American Feminist Movement](#),” for the Asian American Feminist Collective
- Tiffany Diane Tso (2018) “[14 Powerful Portraits Showing the Diversity of Asian American Feminism](#)”
- Sing Yin Khor (2016) “[Say It With Noodles: On Learning to Speak the Language of Food](#)” on *Catapult*.
- Visit Asian American Virtual Museum’s [Basement Workshop](#) virtual exhibit

### **Week 9: Wedge politics and cross-racial solidarities.**

Tuesday, March 22

- Laura Pulido (2006) *Black, brown, yellow, and left: radical activism in Los Angeles*, “Serving the People and Vanguard Politics: The Formation of the Third World Left in Los Angeles”
- Diane Wong (2021) “The Future Is Ours To Build: Asian American Counterstories for Black Liberation,” in *Politics, Groups, and Identities*
- Kimberly Reyes (2018) “[Affirmative Action Shouldn’t Be About Diversity](#),” in *The Atlantic*

- Tiffany Diane Tso (2018) “[Nail Salon Brawls and Boycotts: Unpacking the Black Asian Conflict in America.](#)”
- Christian Edlagan and Kavya Vaghul (2016) “[Data Disaggregation Matters,](#)” in *Equitable Growth*

### **Week 10: Pasts and futures of labor and resistance.**

Tuesday, March 29

- Eric Tang (2016) *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*, “Workfare Encampments” and “Sweatshops of the Neoplantation”
- Xiaolan Bao (2006) *Holding Up More Than Half the Sky*, “Women in Chinatown Garment Industry”
- Miliann Kang (2003) “The Managed Hand: Commercialization of Bodies and Emotions in Korean Immigrant–Owned Nail Salons,” in *Gender & Society*
- Monisha Das Gupta (2004) “A view of post-9/11 justice from below,” in *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*
- Molly Crabapple (2021) “[How the Taxi Workers Won,](#)” in *The Nation*
- Rona Akbari (2017) “[How to Create a Zine](#)” in *Creative Independent*.

### **Week 11: Islamophobia and post 9/11 Asian America.**

Tuesday, April 5

- Vijay Prashad (2012) *Uncle Swami: South Asians in America Today*, “The Day Our Probation Ended”
- Deepa Iyer (2021) *We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future*, “Disruptors and Bridge Builders” and “Ferguson Is Everywhere”
- Deepa Iyer (2021) “[Twenty Years Later, Asian Americans Are Building the Scaffolding for Solidarity,](#)” in *Asian American Writers Workshop’s The Margins*
- Sunaina Maira (2010) “Citizenship and Dissent: South Asian Muslim youth in the US after 9/11,” in *South Asian Popular Culture*
- Michelle Caswell (2015) *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles*, “Documenting South Asian American Struggles against Racism: Community Archives in a Post-9/11 World”
- Visit the [South Asian American Digital Archives \(SAADA\)](#)

### **Week 12: Displacement, detention, and arresting citizenship.**

Tuesday, April 12

- Angela Y. Davis (2003) *Are Prisons Obsolete*, “Introduction — Prison Reform or Prison Abolition”

- Rachel Kushner (2019) “[Is Prison Necessary? Ruth Wilson Gilmore Might Change Your Mind](#),” in *New York Times Magazine*
- Elena Shih (2021) “The Trafficking Deportation Pipeline: Asian Body Work and the Auxiliary Policing of Racialized Poverty,” in *Feminist Formations*
- Kimberly Yam (2018) “[The Forgotten Asian Refugees Fed Into the Prison System](#),” in *Huffpost*
- Eric Tang (2016) *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*, “Motherhood” and “Conclusion”

### Week 13: Asian Americans in the Movement for Black Lives

Tuesday, April 19

- Ta-Nehisi Coates (2014) “[The Case for Reparations](#),” in *The Atlantic*, also available as audio on [soundcloud](#)
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) *From Black Lives Matter to Black Liberation*, “Black Lives Matter: A Movement, Not Moment”
- Movement for Black Lives, [Platform and Demands](#)
- Letters for Black Lives (2017) “[An Open Letter to Our Families About Black Lives Matter](#)”
- Kayan Cheung-Miaw (2016) “[Dear Brother](#)” on Colorlines
- Mark Tseng Putterman (2017) “[On Vincent Chin and the Kind of Men You Send to Jail](#)” in *Asian American Writers Workshop’s The Margins*

### Week 14: Dreaming of Otherwise Worlds

Tuesday, April 26

- Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice*, “Care Webs: Experiments in Creative Collective Access”
- Rinku Sen (2018) “[How to Organize Asian Americans](#),” in *Reappropriate*
- Robin D.G Kelley (2003) *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, “When History Sleeps” and “When History Wakes”