

Asian American Literature and Popular Culture

ENGL 318.61-01, TF, 2:10-3:25

FALL 2007, HW 604

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“Citizens inhabit the political space of the nation, a space that is, at once, juridically legislated, territorially situated, and culturally embodied. Although the law is perhaps the discourse that most literally governs citizenship, U.S. national culture—the collectively forged images, histories, and narratives that place, displace, and replace individuals in relation to the national polity—powerfully shapes who the citizenry is, where they dwell, what they remember, and what they forget.” Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*.

“How does it feel like to be a solution?” Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*.

Course Description and Objectives

How do you define Asian America? What is the significance of Asian America literature and popular culture? In particular, how has Asian American culture been central to the building of the United States of America? This is a course about Asian American literature and popular culture after the Civil Rights Movement. It provides an overview of race, gender, and class relations in the United States embedded within the broader structure of culture and social institutions. This course is a comparative study of Asian American writers, filmmakers, spoken word artists, hip-hop performers, sports figures, and internet cyberstars, and the historical contexts in which they produce their works. I hope that this framework will foster critical reflection about how we imagine and reimagine Asian American identity and culture, and the importance of “national culture” for the formation of citizenship and community. In particular, we analyze constructions of femininity and masculinity, narrations of race and national belonging, and contestations and solidarities between racialized communities. Furthermore, in this course, I ask students to explore the interconnections between race, gender, sexuality, class, and nation in relation to the global economy and multicultural discourses. Though we will discuss specific ethnic and racial groups at times, the overall focus will be the ample context connecting each of those groups to a shared history with present day relevance.

Required Texts:

Novels: *Bone*, Fae Myenne Ng

No-No Boy, John Okada

Dictee, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

Dogeaters, Jessica Hagedorn

Films: *Rush Hour*, Brett Ratner
Romeo Must Die, Andrej Bartowiak
Three Seasons, Tony Bui
A.K.A. Don Bonus, Sokly Ny

Discs: *Broken Speak*, I Was Born With Two Tongues
Self: Volume 1, Mountain Brothers

Supplements: *The Elements of Style*, 4th ed., William Strunk Jr., and E.B. White

Assignments and Grading

Attendance and Class Participation: 25%
 Critical Thinking Response Papers: 25%
 Midterm Exam: 25%
 Research Paper (4-6 pp.): 25%

Course Requirements:

1. This is a reading and writing intensive course. If you feel you cannot keep up with class readings, this may not be the right course for you. Class attendance is important and crucial. Most exam questions will derive from lectures, discussions, and readings. You will be allowed two excused absences, no questions asked. Thereafter, subsequent unexcused absences will affect your grade. For every unexcused absence, your attendance and class participation will be deducted by 5%. Three tardies count as an unexcused absence. That said, the highest grade you can get for perfect attendance is a B. To get an A, you must contribute consistently throughout the semester. This means you can ask questions, bring up discussion points, and make comments for discussion. I'm looking for earnest, analytic discussion rather than "sounding right or smart." Contributing shows me that you are prepared and ready to engage in the classroom. If you feel that this skill is a weaknesses, then come with prepared comments or questions for the class.

2. One of the main purposes of this course is to introduce students to the major literary and cultural works in Asian American creative and intellectual thought. Reading these works is the foundation of any thoughtful reflection and knowledge acquisition. Thus, there will be critical reading responses that account for 25% of your grade. For all readings, the reading responses will be due on Tuesdays of each week's assigned readings. These reading responses are not summary, but critical reflections, analyses, and/or intellectual arguments. For example, you could examine a particular passage in a novel and analyze its theme, structure, symbolism, figurative language and/or relevance to course themes and objectives. Commentary means saying something you are questioning, agreeing, disagreeing, probing, and critiquing. In short, critical thinking involves interpreting, challenging, and refereeing the views of others. Reading responses will be 12-point font, 1" margins, and 250-300 words. Please follow these guidelines.

Late assignments will not be accepted and no email submissions.

3. Exams: You will have a midterm exam. The midterm will be comprised of short answers and a longer essay response designed to test your comprehension and ability to apply the information from class lectures, assigned readings, and discussion. You will be graded upon comprehension and synthesis of required texts, lectures, and discussion. The exam will be worth 25% of your final grade. **Be sure to take notes in class.** Yes, there will be a review.

4. The final research paper will be 4-6 pp. in length. You will be asked to provide a proposal, first draft, and final draft. Each part of the writing process will be factored into your overall grade. 5% for proposal, 5% for 1st draft, and 15% for final draft. You will have **at least 5** secondary sources. Research papers will be original work, and graded on the **entire writing process**, i.e. revisions, and workshop attendance.

Please Note: Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g. plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The college is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures. I take plagiarism seriously, and have seen all the tricks, so do this the right way.

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of Accessibility located in Room 1124 East to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212-772-4857) /TTY (212-650-3230).

Schedule of Classes

Introduction: Racialization and National Culture

T 8.28: Asian American Cultures and the Making of Modern America

F 8.31: Racialization and National Culture; Selections Helen Zia, *Asian American Dreams*.

Asian American Citizenship: Citizen-Soldiers, and No-No Boys

T 9.4: READ: *No-No Boy*, John Okada, pp. iv-68.

F 9.7: *No-No Boy*, John Okada, pp. 69-143.

T 9.11: *No-No Boy*, John Okada, pp. 145-251.

F 9.14: No classes scheduled.

Race, Gender, and Labor: Global Capitalism and Unofficial History

- T 9.18: READ: *Bone*, Fae Myenne Ng, pp. 1-61 (classes follow Friday schedule).
 F 9.21: No classes scheduled.

- T 9.25: *Bone*, Fae Myenne, pp. 62-121.
 F 9.28: *Bone*, Fae Myenne, pp. 122-194.

Asian Immigration and Cold War Militarization

- T 10.2: SCREEN: *Three Seasons*, Tony Bui.
 F 10.5 SCREEN: *A.K.A. Don Bonus*, Sokly Ny.

- T 10.9 READ: *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, pp. 1-90.
 F 10.12 *Dictee*, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, pp. 91-179.

U.S. Popular Memory and Colonial Conquest

- T 10.16 READ: *Dogeaters*, Jessica Hagedorn, pp. 1-61.
 F 10.19 *Dogeaters*, Jessica Hagedorn, pp.62-120.

- T 10.23 *Dogeaters*, Jessica Hagedorn, pp.121-178.
 F 10.26 *Dogeaters*, Jessica Hagedorn, pp. 179-251.

Martial Arts Buddy Films: Hip-Hop Buddies and Kung-Fu Fighters

- T 10.30 SCREEN: *Rush Hour*, Brett Ratner.
 F 11.2 SCREEN: *Romeo Must Die*, Andrej Bartowiak.

- T 11.6 Review and Writing Workshop. **Research Paper Proposals Due.**
 F 11.9 **Midterm Exam.**

The Emergence of Afro-Asian Hip-Hop: Styling Subcultures

- T 11.13 LISTEN: *Self: Volume 1.*, Mountain Brothers; Selections from Trish Rose.
 F 11.16 *The Rest is History*, Jin; *Typical Cats*, Typical Cats; Lyrics Born; The Pacifics.

- T 11.20 Classes follow a Thursday schedule.
 W 11.21 Classes follow Friday schedule. Writing Workshop: **1st Draft Research Paper Due.**
 F 11.23 Thanksgiving Break. No classes scheduled.

Performance Artists and Internet Stars

- T 11.27 Listen: *Broken Speak*, I Was Born With Two Tongues, Tracks 1-20.
 F 11.30 cont. *Broken Speak*, I Was Born With Two Tongues; Beau Sia; Ishle Park.
 T 12.4 Around Asian American Cyberspace: angryasiangirl.com, happyslip.com, asianavenue.com, modelminority.com, goldsea.com, angryasianman.com, etc.
 F 12.7 Asian Transnational Sport.

Conclusion

T 12.11 Final Reflections and Final Questions. **Final Papers Due.**

Final Syllabus Thoughts: I would like every student in my course to learn and to receive a good grade based upon fairness, thoughtful reflection, and effort. If you ever feel overwhelmed or lost in the course, please make an appointment with me. Thanks, great to work with you all, and let's have a great course.

"The more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, and the better I can imagine how I would feel or think in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking, and the more valid my final conclusion, my opinion." Hannah Arendt.