

ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY: SETTLEMENT AND NATIONAL BELONGING

History/Asian American Studies 161 • Spring Semester 2025



Lecture Time: Monday/Wednesday 2:30 - 3:45pm
Room: Science Hall 180

Professor: Cindy I-Fen Cheng [she/her]
Office Hours: Mon 12:30-1:30pm; Wed 1-2pm; and by appt.
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Graduate Instructor: David Hice [he/him]
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our course addresses a pressing matter: how did our nation come to accept birthright as the legal basis for U.S. citizenship and why was an Asian American at the center of this legal debate? And at what point did our nation decide to abolish the whites-only rule to naturalized citizenship and why did Asian Americans find themselves once again at the center of those legal debates?

As Asian Americans are racialized as nonwhite and typecast as “perpetual foreigners,” they offer an interesting window into how race and xenophobia or the fear of the foreign shape who gets to be an American. But beyond examining how citizenship as a legal status governs the belonging of Asian Americans in the United States, this course explores the importance of cultural citizenship. Here, we consider how the national belonging of Asian Americans is also shaped by their representation or lack thereof in U.S. popular culture. Our examination into places, movies, plays, books, and teaching curriculums highlights how Asian Americans have labored to create a more flexible vision of who counts as an American.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

| | | |
|---|-------------|--------------------|
| Discussion Attendance and Participation | 20% | 200 points |
| Lecture Attendance and Participation | 20% | 200 points |
| Assignment 1 | 15% | 150 points |
| Exam 1 | 15% | 150 points |
| Assignment 2 | 15% | 150 points |
| Exam 2 | 15% | 150 points |
| Extra Credit: | | 20 points |
| TOTAL: | 100% | 1000 points |

Course Point Breakdown

| Letter Grade | Point Range | Percentage Range |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| A | 925 to 1000 | 92.5% and higher |
| AB | 875 to 924 | 87.5% to 92.4% |
| B | 825 to 874 | 82.5% to 87.4% |
| BC | 775 to 824 | 77.5% to 82.4% |
| C | 695 to 774 | 69.5% to 77.4% |
| D | 595 to 694 | 59.5% to 69.4% |
| F | 594 and below | 59.4% and below |

We will provide point breakdowns and rubrics for each assignment and exam.

Course Credit Hours

This 4-credit course meets as a group, lecture and discussion section, for a total of 4 hours per week. In addition to class time, students are expected to spend an average of 2 hours for every 1 hour of class time or 8 hours a week on completing the assigned readings, preparing for discussion sections, writing papers, and/or studying for exams.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- COURSE READER is available for purchase at [L&S Copy Center](#) located at Room 6120 Sewell Hall, Social Science Building.
- Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13360* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).
- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1988).

** A copy of all the required texts is available on reserve at the College Library**

FILMS

- *History and Memory*
- *San Francisco State: On Strike*
- *"We're Asians, Gay and Proud": The Story Behind the Photo*
- *Exploring the Roots of Chicago's Queer South Asian Community*
- *China Dolls*
- *Sa-I-Gu*
- *Slaying the Dragon*
- *Nice Chinese Girls Don't: Kitty Tsui*
- *The Grace Lee Project*
- *1000% Me: Growing Up Mixed*

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Introduction

W 1/22

WEEK 2 Birthright Citizenship

M 1/27

W 1/29

Reading:

- Amanda Frost, "By Accident of Birth': The Battle Over Birthright Citizenship After *United States v. Wong Kim Ark*," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 32, no 1 (2021): 38-76.

WEEK 3 Racial Naturalization

M 2/3

W 2/5

Readings:

- The Naturalization Act of 1790
- Ian Haney Lopez, "Ozawa and Thind" in *White by Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 56-77.

WEEK 4 Marriage, Race, and Citizenship

M 2/10

W 2/12

Reading:

- Martha Mabie Gardner, "When Americans are not Citizens" and "When Citizens are not White" in *The Qualities of a Citizen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 121-156.

WEEK 5 **The Limits of Citizenship: WWII Incarceration of Japanese Americans**

M 2/17
W 2/19 Assignment 1 DUE

Reading:

- Mae Ngai, "The WWII Internment of Japanese Americans and the Citizenship Renunciation Cases" in *Impossible Subjects* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 175-201.

WEEK 6 **The Limits of Citizenship: WWII Incarceration of Japanese Americans**

M 2/24
W 2/26 Film: *History and Memory*

Reading:

- Mine Okubo, *Citizen 13360* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).
- Mitsuye Yamada, "Evacuation" and "The Question of Loyalty" in *Camp Notes and Other Writings* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 13 and 29.

WEEK 7 **The Politics of Integration**

M 3/3
W 3/5 Exam 1

Reading:

- "Out of Chinatown and into the Suburbs," *American Quarterly* 58, no 4 (2006):1067-1090.

WEEK 8 **The Battle for Ethnic Studies**

M 3/10 Film: *San Francisco State: On Strike*
W 3/12

Readings:

- Karen Umemoto, "'On Strike!'" in *Contemporary Asian America* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 25-59.
- "Lumumba-Zapata College: B.S.C.-M.A.Y.A. demands for the Third College, U.C.S.D.," March 14, 1969.

WEEK 9 **Queering Asian America**

M 3/17 Films: *"We're Asians, Gay and Proud": The Story Behind the Photo; Exploring the Roots of Chicago's Queer South Asian Community*
W 3/19 Extra Credit 1 DUE; Film: *China Dolls*

Reading:

- Amy Sueyoshi, "Breathing Fire: Remembering Asian Pacific Islander Activism in Queer History" in *LGBTQ America* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Foundation, 2016), 11-1 - 11-38.

WEEK 10 **Spring Break**

M 3/24
W 3/26

WEEK 11 **The Political Economy of Belonging: 1992 Los Angeles Uprising**

M 3/31
W 4/2 Film: *Sa-I-Gu*

Readings:

- Melvin L. Oliver, James Johnson, and Walter Farrell, "Anatomy of a Rebellion" in *Reading Rodney King* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 117-141.
- Ron Daniels, "America's poem, or, 81 seconds and 56 blows" in *Why L.A. Happened* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993), 136-140.

WEEK 12 **Race and Popular Culture**

M 4/7 Film: *Slaying the Dragon*
W 4/9

Reading:

- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, from beginning of play (Playwright's Notes and Setting) to the end of Act One (page 41).

WEEK 13 **Race and Popular Culture**

M 4/14

W 4/16 Assignment 2 DUE; Film: *Nice Chinese Girls Don't: Kitty Tsui*

Reading:

- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*, from Act Two to end of play, including Author's Afterword (pg. 42-100).

WEEK 14 **Multiracial Belongings**

M 4/21 Film: *The Grace Lee Project*

W 4/23 Extra Credit 2 DUE

Readings:

- Katie Cunningham, "Defining Ourselves: Multiracial Identity for Modern-Day Asian Americans," *Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage*, October 7, 2015, <https://folklife.si.edu/talkstory/2015/defining-ourselves-multiracial-identity-for-modern-day-asian-americans>
- Maura Hohman, "As a 'White-Passing' Asian American, I Feel Grief, Shame and Confusion Right Now," *Today*, May 20, 2021, <https://www.today.com/tmrw/white-passing-asian-american-i-feel-grief-shame-confusion-right-t213373>

WEEK 15 **Multiracial Belongings**

M 4/28 Honors Project DUE; Film: *1000% Me: Growing Up Mixed*

W 4/30 Exam 2

COURSE POLICIES

Technology-Free Learning Environment: In order to foster an engaged learning environment, History/Asian American Studies 161 is a technology-free class. Students are not allowed to use their laptops or any electronic device in class, both lecture and discussion sections. Phones must be on silent mode and stowed away from plain sight. Please take notes using a pencil or pen and a notebook. Taking photos of lecture slides or recording lecture is prohibited, per university policy, unless authorized for students living with disabilities.

Attendance: Regular attendance, active participation, and mature attentiveness during lecture and discussion sections are mandatory. Excused absences may be granted with valid documentation, subject to Professor Cheng's discretion.

Discussion Sections: You will not pass the course even if you complete all the written work and exams but do not attend weekly discussion sections. Your TA will provide additional guidelines for discussion sections.

Readings: You are expected to complete all required readings before Monday's lecture of each week. Please bring your books, readers, and lecture notes to each discussion section.

Assignments: Assignments are always due during the first ten minutes of lecture. Any assignment received after the first ten minutes of lecture on the due date is considered late. Late assignments received after the first ten minutes of lecture will receive a 10-point deduction for every day the assignment is late. E-mail submissions will not be credited or graded. Extensions may be granted in cases of personal emergencies, subject to prompt notification, valid documentation, and Professor Cheng's discretion. Students are responsible for retaining a copy of all assignments.

Examinations: Exam 1 and Exam 2 will take place on the date indicated on the course syllabus. Make-up examinations may be granted in cases of personal emergencies, subject to prompt notification, valid documentation, and Professor Cheng's discretion. Students are responsible for retaining a copy of all exams.

Honesty: Please read the [university policy on academic integrity and misconduct](#). Please note that all information borrowed from print sources or the web, including ChatGPT, must be clearly identified and properly credited. Please note that submitting AI-generated text for class assignments is plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating on assignments and exams will result in a "F" grade for the course.

Accommodations: Any student who feels that they may need accommodation should contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) at 608-263-274 (phone); 608-225-7956 (text); info@mcburney.wisc.edu (e-mail) to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

NEED HELP WITH WRITING?

The History Lab: The History Lab is a resource center for undergraduate students studying, researching, and writing about the past. Through individual and group tutoring, the Lab focuses on honing students' abilities to form suitable topics, conduct research, develop arguments and thesis statements, cite evidence properly, and write using an effective process. The Lab is equipped also to support challenges faced by English-language learners. For more information and appointment, please visit: <https://history.wisc.edu/thehistorylab.htm>

The Writing Center: The Writing Center supports writers within and beyond the university across **all levels**, disciplines, and identities. Readers at the Writing Center are committed to using **inclusive** and **accessible** teaching practices. For more information and appointment, please visit: <https://writing.wisc.edu/>

DEGREE FULFILLMENTS

Ethnic Studies Requirement: History/Asian American Studies 161 is part of the University's vibrant course array that fulfills the Ethnic Studies Requirement. By illuminating the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, this "e" designated course advances three goals of the University:

- Better prepare students for life and careers in an increasingly multicultural environment
- Add breadth and depth to the University curriculum
- Improve campus climate

Additionally, this course fulfills the four Essential Learning Outcomes of the Ethnic Studies Requirement:

- Awareness of History's Impact on the Present - Ethnic Studies courses highlight how certain histories have been valued and devalued, and how these differences have promulgated disparities in contemporary American society.
- Ability to Recognize and Question Assumptions - Ethnic Studies courses promote recognition and application of critical thinking skills, specifically with respect to teaching students to harbor a healthy skepticism towards knowledge claims, whether in the form of media, political, or popular representations, primarily as these relate to race and ethnicity. As part of this process, the ESR should challenge students to question their own assumptions and preconceived notions on these topics.

- A Consciousness of Self and Other - Awareness of self is inextricably linked with awareness of and empathy towards the perspectives of others. In constructing a space for this kind of discussion in their classrooms, Ethnic Studies courses give students an opportunity to think about identity issues, including their own identity, as well as the connections they might have to people “outside” their focused social circle.
- Effective Participation in a Multicultural Society - Ethnic Studies courses should be relevant to students’ “lives outside the classroom,” and pursuing the objectives above should not only lead to student behavioral change, but to action in the real world. The ESR should ultimately engender in students the ability to participate in a multicultural society more effectively, respectfully, and meaningfully. This participation may be as mundane as being able to discuss race with a colleague or friend, or to recognize inequities in interpersonal, institutional, or other contexts.

Asian American Studies Certificate Program: History/Asian American Studies 161 also fulfills the [Asian American Studies Certificate Program](#) requirements. The Asian American Studies Certificate Program provides students with an opportunity to develop a sustained intellectual focus on Asian American racial formation, history, literature, and culture. Interdisciplinary in nature, the certificate can be obtained by completing 15 credits of coursework. The certificate program is open to any undergraduate student who has an interest in Asian American Studies.

The Hmoob American Studies Emphasis: Within the AAS Certificate Program, students have the option to declare a [HMoob American Studies Emphasis](#). This special track promotes an in-depth examination of HMoob American history and culture and can be obtained if 6 out of 15 credits are completed by taking designated HMoob American Studies courses within the Asian American Studies curriculum.

Honors Optional Enrollment: This course offers Honors Optional enrollment for students who want to be challenged and complete an extra assignment beyond the course requirements. For those who are taking this course for Honors credit, you must schedule a one-on-one meeting with Professor Cheng to discuss your honors project. For those who would like more information about the L&S Honors Program, please visit: <https://honors.ls.wisc.edu/>