

ASIAN AMERICAN HISTORY: SETTLEMENT AND NATIONAL BELONGING

History/Asian American Studies 161 • Spring Semester 2026



Lecture Time: Tuesday/Thursday 11:00am - 12:15pm
Room: 1651 Mosse Humanities Building

Professor: Cindy I-Fen Cheng [she/her]
Office Hours: Tue 12:15-1:15pm; Thu 12:15-1:15pm; and by appt.
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Graduate Instructor: Verenize Arceo [she/her]
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course addresses some key concerns confronting our nation today: how did we come to accept birthright as the legal basis for U.S. citizenship? And at what point did we decide to abolish the whites-only rule to naturalized citizenship?

To answer these questions, we trace the roots of these debates and how questions over the legal status Asian Americans formed the foundational arguments of these discussions. In addition to exploring how the qualifications for legal citizenship in the United States changed over time, we investigate the importance of culture and the pathways that movies, memoirs, graphic novels, music, places, and teaching curriculums created to determine our belonging in the nation. Our examinations are directed towards surveying how Asian Americans created a more flexible vision of the U.S. national identity.

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

1. COURSE READER is available for purchase at <https://charge.wisc.edu/DoITDigitalPrintCenter/>.
 - The UW Digital Publishing and Printing Services (DPPS) will mail your course reader via UPS 1-day directly to your home address.
 - For instance, if you purchase your course reader during business hours on Monday, the Course Reader will be mailed to you on Tuesday, and you should expect the Course Reader to arrive at your home address on Wednesday.
2. *The Magic Fish* by Trung Le Nguyen
 - Please purchase a hard copy of book at any online vendor.
 - You may also purchase a copy, new or used, at the University Bookstore on campus, <https://text.uwbookstore.com/CourseMaterials>.
3. *Shortcomings* by Adrian Tomine
 - Please purchase a hard copy of book at any online vendor.
 - You may also purchase a copy, new or used, at the University Bookstore on campus, <https://text.uwbookstore.com/CourseMaterials>.

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

FILMS

- *History and Memory*
- *San Francisco State: On Strike*
- *Sa-I-Gu*
- *"We're Asians, Gay and Proud": The Story Behind the Photo*
- *Gaysians*
- *Slaying the Dragon*
- *Nice Chinese Girls Don't: Kitty Tsui*
- *1000% Me: Growing Up Mixed*

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Introduction

Tu 1/20
Th 1/22

WEEK 2 Birthright Citizenship

Tu 1/27
Th 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

T 2/3
Th 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

Tu 2/10
Th 2/12

Reading:

- Nancy F. Cott, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 5 (1998): 1440-1474.

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

Tu 2/17

Th 2/19

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**

T 2/24 Assignment 1 DUE; Film: *History and Memory*

Th 2/26

Reading:

- Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973), chapters 1-2, 5.

WEEK 7 **The Battle for Ethnic Studies**

Tu 3/3 Film: *San Francisco State: On Strike*

Th 3/5

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 8 **Place and Belonging: 1992 Los Angeles Uprising**

Tu 3/10

Th 3/12 Exam 1

Reading:

- Ron Daniels, "America's poem, or, 81 seconds and 56 blows" in *Why L.A. Happened* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993), 136-140.

WEEK 9 **Place and Belonging: 1992 Los Angeles Uprising**

Tu 3/17

Th 3/19 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.

WEEK 10 **Generational Divides: Place and Language**

Tu 3/24 Extra Credit DUE

Th 3/26

Readings:

- Michelle Zauner, "Crying in H Mart," *The New Yorker*, August 20, 2018.
- Mina Marjorie Yoo-Sharifi, "Lost in Translation: The Cost of Language Loss," March 30, 2023.

WEEK 11 **Spring Break ☺**

Tu 3/31

Th 4/2

WEEK 12 **Finding a Common Language**

Tu 4/7 Film: *We're Asians, Gay and Proud; Gaysians*

Th 4/9

Reading:

- Trung Le Nguye, *The Magic Fish* (New York: RH Graphic, 2020).

WEEK 13 **Gender and Interracial Crossings**

Tu 4/14 Assignment 2 DUE
Film: *Slaying the Dragon, Nice Chinese Girls Don't: Kitty Tsui*
Th 4/16

Reading:

- Adrian Tomine, *Shortcomings* (Montreal, Quebec: Drawn & Quarterly, 2007).

WEEK 14 **Multiracial Belongings**

Tu 4/21
Th 4/23

Readings:

- Katie Gee Salisbury, "Growing Up in the 626," *Asian American Writers' Workshop*, August 31, 2016.
- Tyrone Nagai, "Multiracial Americans throughout the History of the US," in *Race Policy and Multiracial Americans* (Bristol: Briston University Press, 2016).

WEEK 15 **Multiracial Belongings**

Tu 4/28 Honors Project DUE; Film: *1000% Me: Growing Up Mixed*
Th 4/30 Exam 2

COURSE POLICIES

Technology-Free Learning Environment: To cultivate an engaged learning environment, History/Asian American Studies 161 is a technology-free class. Please turn your phone to silent mode and place your phone, laptop, and any other electronic devices away from plain sight. Please take class notes using a pen or pencil and a notebook.

Attendance: Regular attendance, active participation, and mature attentiveness during lecture and discussion sections are mandatory. We do not post lecture notes. If you miss lecture, please contact a fellow classmate for lecture notes.

Discussion Sections: Discussion sections strengthen your learning and provide a comfortable setting to get to know other students and your TA. Attendance is mandatory. You will not pass this class even if you attend lecture and complete all written work and exams but fail to attend your weekly discussion section. Your TA will provide additional guidelines.

Readings: You are expected to complete all assigned readings before Tuesday's lecture of each week. Please bring your readings and notes to each class meeting.

Assignments: Assignments are due during the first ten minutes of lecture. Any assignment received after the first ten minutes of lecture on the due date is late. Late assignments will receive a 15-point deduction for each day that it is late. Extensions are granted in cases of personal emergencies, contingent upon prompt notification, valid documentation, and Professor Cheng's discretion. Students are responsible for retaining a copy of all assignments.

Examinations: Exam 1 and the Exam 2 will be administered on the date indicated in the course syllabus. Make-up examinations are granted in cases of personal emergencies, contingent upon 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. Any instance of plagiarism or cheating on assignments or exams will result in a "F" grade for the assignment or exam and the course. Submitting AI-generated text for class assignments is plagiarism.

Accommodations: Please contact the [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#) if you feel that you may need accommodations for this course: 608-263-274 (phone); 608-225-7956 (text); info@mcburney.wisc.edu (e-mail).

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/>