

AMST/AFAM291Z: Afro-Asian Intersections in the Americas

Summer 2022
MTWRF 1:30-3:10
Location TBA

Professor Amy Tang
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M 3:10-4:10
285 Court St., #202
and by appointment

Course Overview

This course explores a range of historical, cultural, and political intersections between African Americans and Asian Americans from the late nineteenth century to the present. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, we will examine key moments in the history of Afro-Asian encounters in the Americas, including the importation of slave and coolie labor in the 19th century, the formation of anticolonial and antiracist “Third World” movements in the U.S., and the Los Angeles Uprising of 1992. We will also study forms of cultural interracialism, from African Americans’ mania for kung fu in the 1970s, to the interracial buddy film *Rush Hour* (1998), and from the contemporary fiction of writers such as Patricia Powell and Charles Johnson to the sounds of hip hop. As this brief overview suggests, we will be examining a diverse selection of texts including history, fiction, ethnography, cultural studies, and film.

Course Requirements and Policies

Attendance and Participation: This course is a seminar whose success depends on your participation and willingness to share your responses to course material. That said, as an interdisciplinary course that takes up topics of slavery, labor exploitation, racial and class conflict and more, it may prove more difficult than other courses. I want to encourage you to be patient with yourselves and your classmates, to fully engage the course material, and to be willing to share your insights, questions, and concerns with your peers. Don’t feel shy about talking if you feel you haven’t understood everything about the reading, or if you feel your observations are “obvious.” We all read differently and notice different things, and any uncertainties or confusion or doubts you have are almost certainly shared by others, and sharing them in class will help us all move ahead in our understanding.

Attendance is mandatory; more than two absences will impact your grade; more than four absences will result in a failing grade.

Focus Points: Twice a week (once a week for partial weeks 1 and 5), you will post on Moodle one “focus point” in response to the assigned reading. These should consist of one or two very targeted short paragraphs reflecting on the reading for the next day’s class. Occasionally I will post a question or theme or concern to help you focus your responses, or you are welcome to direct our attention to something of your own choosing. In either case, please focus on a specific passage, problem, or concern in the reading, referring to specific passages in the text and noting page numbers, and be prepared to discuss your focus point in class. Focus points will be due by midnight, and should cover reading for the next day of class. You will need to do a total of 8 focus points over the semester (no more than 2/week). These responses will not be graded – you will receive credit/no credit and collectively they will be worth 10% of your grade.

These focus points have two purposes: first, to give you a formal opportunity to reflect on the readings before class begins and second, to serve as a starting place for class discussions. Here is an example:

On page 173, Kikuchi writes: “It is an immeasurably harder task for [African Americans] to assimilate than the Nisei.” This use of the term “assimilate” stands out to me, because African Americans are already American; why would they need to assimilate? Yet using “assimilate” instead of “integrate” reveals the way that successful integration really depends on assimilation into mainstream white culture. This passage underlines the odd truth that it is easier for more recently arrived Japanese immigrants to assimilate into white American culture than for African Americans who already have an entire history in the U.S. Theoretically, it would be just as easy to place recent immigrants at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy, yet this quote about assimilation shows the way that history, the persistence of the legacy of slavery, is much harder to work against than more recent prejudices.

Discussion Leader: Once during the course, you will work in pairs to lead class discussion for the day by selecting a few passages from the assigned reading and preparing 2-3 discussion questions to accompany each passage. You will need to coordinate with your partner in advance and you will be expected to turn in your notes at the end of class. Sign-ups will take place in the second week of class. This will comprise 8% of your grade.

Writing Assignments: You will turn in four papers on the dates listed on the syllabus. Prompts will be distributed in advance of each deadline. Late papers will be downgraded 1/3 grade for each day late (e.g. a B+ paper that is turned in 2 days late will receive a B-).

For your final paper, you will be asked to write about one work from outside of class (in relation to a text from class); so keep your eyes open during the semester for materials that relate to the course that you might like to explore in a paper. I will share a classroom google doc with suggestions, and everyone should feel free to contribute to the list.

Evaluation: Your final grade will be calculated in this way:

Attendance and Participation:	10%
Focus Points	10%
Discussion Leader	8%
Short Essay #1, 3-4 pages	16%
Short Essay #2, 3-4 pages	16%
Short Essay #3, 3-4 pages	16%
Final Essay, 5-7 pages	24%

Disability Resources: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a disability as defined by the ADA. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible.

If you have a disability, or think that you might have a disability, please contact Accessibility Services to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Accessibility Services is located in North College, rooms 021/022, or can be reached by email (accessibility@wesleyan.edu) or phone (860-685-5581).

Honor Code: All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code. Please include the pledge on your paper: “In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged.”

If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the Writing Workshop: www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/

Course Texts (available at RJ. Julia):

Required:

- Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots* (Harvard UP, 1997); ISBN-13: 978-0674077058
- Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (NYU Press, 2010); ISBN-13: 978-0814791332
- Patricia Powell, *The Pagoda* (Mariner, 1999); ISBN-13: 978-0156008297
- Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York “Hyperghetto.”* (Temple UP, 2015); ISBN-13: 978-1439911655

Recommended:

- Fred Ho and Bill Mullen, eds., *Afro-Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections Between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Duke UP, 2008); ISBN-13: 978-0-8223-4281-6
- Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton UP, 2008); ISBN-13: 978-0691146188
- Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Beacon, 2001); ISBN-13: 978-0807050118

Course Schedule

Week 1: Is Yellow Black or White?

- 5/25 Introduction
View in class:
Mountains That Take Wing: Angela Davis and Yuri Kochiyama (2009 film, excerpts)
“Are Asians Next in Line to Be White?” (PBS digital studios)
- 5/26 Gary Okihiro, “Is Yellow Black or White?”
Fred Ho and Bill Mullen, Introduction to *Afro Asia*

Slave, Free, or Coolie?

- 5/27 Ronald Takaki, from *Strangers from a Different Shore*
Moon-ho Jung, from *Coolies and Cane*
Vijay Prashad, “Coolie Purana”

Week 2: Crossings

5/30 Patricia Powell, *The Pagoda* (1-146)

5/31 Patricia Powell, *The Pagoda* (146-245)

Early 20thc Intersections

6/1 Helen Jun, “Black Orientalism”
Vivek Bald, from *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of Asian America*
Vijay Prashad, “The Merchant is Always a Stranger”

6/2 Scott Kurashige, from *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans and the Making of Multicultural Los Angeles* (Introduction and Chapter 7)

6/3 Hisaye Yamamoto, “Wilshire Bus”; “A Fire in Fontana”

Paper #1 Due on Moodle, 11:59 p.m.

Week 3: Postwar Racialisms**Coloring Between the Lines**

6/6 Leslie Bow, from *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*, Introduction (“Thinking Interstitially”) Chapter 3 (“White Is and White Ain’t”) *Mississippi Triangle* (1984 film – available for streaming through library)

Decolonizing the Third World

6/7 Nikhil Singh, from *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*
Robin Kelley and Betsy Esch, from “Black Like Mao: Red China and Black Liberation”

View in class:

American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs (2013 film, excerpts)

Model Minorities

6/8 Robert G. Lee, “The Cold War Origins of the Model Minority Myth”
Daryl Maeda, from “Black Panthers, Red Guards, and Chinamen”
Laura Pulido, from *Black, Brown, Yellow & Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*

Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting

6/9 *Enter the Dragon* (1973 film, DVD on reserve at Olin)
Vijay Prashad, “Kung Fusion: Organize the ‘Hood Under I-Ching Banners”
Crystal S. Anderson, from *Beyond the Chinese Connection: Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production*

- 6/10 Charles Johnson, “China”
Bill Brown “Global Bodies/Postnationalities: Charles Johnson’s Consumer Culture”

Paper #2 Due on Moodle, 11:59 p.m.

Week 4: L.A Uprising, “Black-Korean Conflict” and its Afterlives

- 6/13 Anna Deavere Smith, from *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, “Introduction” and “Timeline”
Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, from *Blue Dreams: Korean Americans and the Los Angeles Riots*,
Chapter 1 (“The Los Angeles Riots”); Chapter 3 (“Diaspora Formation”)
- 6/14 Nancy Abelmann and John Lie, from *Blue Dreams*, Chapter 5 (“Korean American
Entrepreneurship”); Chapter 6 (“American Ideologies on Trial”)
- 6/15 *Sa-I-Gu* (1993 film)
Anna Deavere Smith, selections from *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*
Helen Jun, from *Race for Citizenship* (“Black Surplus in the Pacific Century”)
- 6/16 *Rush Hour* (1998 film)
Mita Banerjee, “The *Rush Hour* of Black/Asian Coalitions?”
Leilani Nishime, “I’m Blackanese”
- 6/17 Nitasha Sharma, from *Hip Hop Desis*
Tamara Roberts, from *Resounding Afro Asia*

Paper #3 Due on Moodle, 11:59 p.m.

WEEK 5: Contemporary Formations

- 6/20 Eric Tang, from *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto*, Introduction; Chapter 5
 (“Sweatshops of the Neoplantation”); Chapter 6 (“Motherhood”)
- 6/21 Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, “Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations”
Dylan Rodriguez, “Asian American Studies in the Age of the Prison-Industrial
Complex”
Vijay Prashad, “Bandung is Done: Passages in Afro-Asian Epistemology”
- 6/23 **Final Paper Due on Moodle, 11:59 p.m.**