

Asian American Activism

Professor

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Course Description

Providing a broad introduction to the history of activism in the United States, this course will specifically examine the roles that Asian Americans & Pacific Islander Americans have fulfilled within both larger advocacy struggles, and the emergence of a distinctly Asian American activist movement.

Firmly rooted in a critical race studies approach toward history, this course will comprehensively assess factors contributing to the historical oppression of AAPIs in mainstream American society, exploring how different groups throughout history have found ways to advocate on their own behalf. Additionally, the course will provide a deeper context behind many of the major advocacy issues, providing a context for how contemporary activist framework evolved out of various movements over the past two hundred years.

Topics will include immigration and naturalization, America's role in empire, decolonization and postcolonial thought, inter-minority tensions and solidarity building practices, Pan-Asianism in the American context, socio-political divides within AAPI communities, Asian settler-colonialism in occupied Hawaii, the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and media activism.

Lectures will combine historical content and discussion of various activists and movements, sometimes featuring guest speakers whose advocacy work relates to the current week's topic.

Additional out of class assignments will be given that involve participation in the virtual programs and in-person community events being offered by various Asian American advocacy groups. Students will be required to participate in at least two community events during the semester, providing an opportunity to engage with and learn from AAPI activists first-hand. Speakers listed in syllabus are subject to change based on speaker availability.

Assessment

There will be two assigned papers during this course, a reflection journal assignment, and one 8-10 minute Final Presentation. All sources must be properly cited. See syllabus for submission deadlines.

Paper 1 – 2,500 words	20%
Paper 2 – 2,500 words	20%
Reflection Journal 3,000-4,000 words	25%
Final Presentation	25%
Participation	10%

Attendance Policy

As this class will be held only once per week, students will be permitted **no more than 2 absences**. In the event that additional absences must be taken, a doctor's note must be provided.

Office Hours

Available by request only.

Readings, Lecture Content, and Guest Speakers are subject to change

Jan 11, Week 1 – Citizenship and Naturalization

Serving as a broad introduction to the course and overview of topics to be explored in the curriculum, students will also be led through a series of icebreakers encouraging them to think critically about their own identities as they pertain to ethnicity. We will also delve into the anti-Chinese legislation of the late 19th century and the early Chinese American activists who fought for equal treatment under immigration law.

Readings:

Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People

Helen Zia, pages 1-39

“Yellow Peril: 19th-Century Scapegoating”

John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats

<https://aaww.org/yellow-peril-scapegoating/>

Immigrant Voices Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation

<https://www.immigrant-voices.aiisf.org/>

“Anti-Chinese Legislation and Court Cases Interactive Timeline”

<http://www.mocanyc.org/timeline/timeline.html>

Jan 23, Week 2 – America's Role in Empire

This lecture will frame United States Pacific Expansionism within the larger context of European Imperialism and the colonization of Asia. Topics will include pseudoscientific applications to race, the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines, and decolonization movements within the Asian American diaspora.

Readings:

Orientalism

Edward Said, Preface & Introduction

“Standing in Solidarity with Native Hawaiians: Japanese Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders”

Pacific Citizen, Rob Buscher

<https://www.pacificcitizen.org/standing-in-solidarity-with-native-hawaiians-japanese-hawaiians-and-pacific-islanders/>

Hawaiian Patriots Project

<https://www.kamakakoi.com/hawaiianpatriots/index.html>

Jan 30, Week 3 – Yellow Power, Ethnic Studies, and Postcolonial Thought

This week will focus on the origins of the first Pan Asian American movements on college campuses at UC Berkeley, SF State, and UCLA. Topics will include Third World Liberation Front, SF State campus strike, and Asian American Political Alliance. The lecture will also include a history of pioneering AAPI media organizations such as Los Angeles-based Visual Communications, and activist zine *Gidra*.

Readings:

“On Strike! San Francisco State College Strike 1968-1969”

Karen Umemoto, Contemporary Asian American, Chapter 1

Serve the People: Making Asian America in the Long Sixties

Karen Ishizuka, Chapter 3 Yellow Power

Yellow Power: The Formation of Asian-American Nationalism in the Age of Black Power, 1966-1975

Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar

(<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ccbh/souls/vol3no3/vol3num3art3.pdf>)

Gidra Archives

Densho - <http://ddr.densho.org/ddr-densho-297/>

Feb 6, Week 4 – Anti-Gentrification Movements

***Guest Speaker Debbie Wei**

This week will provide a broad history of gentrification in the American city from early tenement reforms to contemporary activist struggles. We will be joined by guest speaker Debbie Wei. A lifelong educator and community activist, Debbie helped found Asian Americans United in 1985 to organize low-income and working-class Asian Americans; its victories include winning reform in the School District of Philadelphia for immigrant students and families, improving language access across the city, and stopping the construction of a stadium and a casino in Chinatown. Currently, Debbie is one of the leading voices leading the opposition to 76ers stadium in Philadelphia Chinatown. Debbie also works as a curriculum specialist for the School District of Philadelphia, where she is developing best practices for curricular inclusion of Asian American Studies in K-12 public schools.

Readings:

“Transforming Student Elites into Community Activists”

Harvey Dong

“Bronzeville, Little Tokyo”

Pacific Citizen, Rob Buscher

<https://www.pacificcitizen.org/bronzeville-little-tokyo/>

“Transforming Asian America: Globalization and Contemporary Immigration to US”

Min Zhou and J.V. Gatewood, Contemporary Asian American, Chapter 4

Feb 13, Week 5 – Interethnic Solidarity and Tensions in the Civil Rights Era and Beyond

Paper 1 Due

Topics will include Asian American contributions to the civil rights movement and highlight important activists such as Yuri Kochiyama, Grace Lee Boggs, and Larry

Itliong. We will also engage in an in-depth discussion of the model minority myth that was designed by conservative elements in American society to pit racial minorities against one another. This lecture will also examine the deterioration of inter-minority relations in the lead up to the LA Uprising and how mainstream media framed the looting of Koreatown.

Readings:

Asian American Dreams

Helen Zia, Chapter 4 - To Market, to Market and New York Style, Chapter 7 – Lost and Found in L.A.

“Striving for the American Dream: Struggle, Success, and Intergroup Conflict among Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurs”

Jennifer Lee, Contemporary Asian American, Chapter 10

Ktown 92 Interactive Documentary

Grace Lee (<http://ktown92.com/>)

Feb 20, Week 6 – Interior Exclusion: Japanese American Incarceration During WWII

***Guest Lecturer Sam Mihara**

Students will attend a guest lecture by Sam Mihara that is being co-sponsored by the Philadelphia Chapter of Japanese American Citizens League in recognition of the Day of Remembrance – the annual commemoration of the wartime incarceration that occurs every February 19. Sam is a second-generation Japanese American (Nisei) born and raised in San Francisco. WWII broke out when Sam was 9 years old, when he and his family were forced to move to the Heart Mountain Wyoming prison camp. After three years of incarceration, the family returned home to San Francisco and Sam went on to become a rocket scientist. Sam spent his career at Boeing Company where he became an executive on space programs. Following retirement, Sam changed careers – becoming a national speaker on the topic of mass injustice as he shares his personal experience being incarcerated as an adolescent. Sam is a board member of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation and was recently awarded JACLer of the Biennium at the 2022 JACL National Convention.

Readings:

Executive Order 9066 (<http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp/history/eo9066.html>)

Blindsided: The Life and Times of Sam Mihara

Sam Mihara

“WWII Propaganda: The Influence of Racism”

Hannah Miles

<https://artifactsjournal.missouri.edu/2012/03/wwii-propaganda-the-influence-of-racism/>

Buddha in the Attic

Julie Otsuka, *Traitors & Last Day*

Feb 27, Week 7 – Model Minority, Vincent Chin, and Socio-Economic Class Divide
Asian Americans suffered a major psychological trauma after the racially motivated murder of Chinese American Vincent Chin, but it became a rallying cry for a new age of Pan Asian American activism. This lecture will examine various movements that grew

out of the Japan-bashing era of US manufacturing decline, and the growing socio-economic inequity between various groups of Asian Americans.

Readings:

Asian American Dreams

Helen Zia, Chapter 3 – Detroit Blues and Chapter 8 – For Richer, For Poorer

“Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans Are on the Rise”

Time, Cady Lang <https://time.com/5938482/asian-american-attacks/>

“Asian Americans grapple with racism due to COVID-19”

WHYY, Rob Buscher <https://whyy.org/articles/reality-is-hitting-me-in-the-face-asian-americans-grapple-with-racism-due-to-covid-19/>

Film: *Vincent Who?* (2009) dir. Curtis Chin | 40 mins

Mar 6, NO CLASS - SPRING BREAK

Mar 13, Week 8 – Asian American Labor Movements

This week will introduce the history of organized labor in the United States, and pivotal Asian American labor movements throughout the past century and a half. Topics will include sugar cane plantation workers in Hawaii, cannery workers in Seattle, farm workers in California, garment workers in NYC, and the current fights for education, healthcare, and more.

Readings:

“Carlos Bulosan and the Northwest”

O. Alan Weltzien, The Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Vol. 105, No. 1, pp. 12-22

“CaliMeXina or Bust, Cabrones! Learning to love our Latin-Asian-Pacific Future”

Gustavo Arellano, Boom: A Journal of California, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 88-91

Film: Delano Manongs (26 mins) <https://vids.kvie.org/video/kvie-viewfinder-delano-manongs/>

Mar 20, Week 9 – Asian Americans in Politics

***Guest Speaker Kay Kyungsun Yu**

This week will offer a special focus into the history of Asians and Pacific Islanders involvement in the political process from elected officials and appointed advisory groups, to lobbyists and political strategists. We will be joined by guest speaker Kay Kyungsun Yu, a candidate running for Judge of the Court of Common Pleas. Kay’s mother brought her to the United States from Korea as an undocumented immigrant when she was a baby. Years later, Kay argued her own case for citizenship and was sworn in as an American citizen the year she graduated from law school. Since that day, Kay has fought for civil rights, stronger communities, and equal opportunity. Kay previously served as Chairperson of the Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations under Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, and Commissioner on Governor Tom Wolf’s Advisory Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs.

Readings:

Asian American Dreams

Helen Zia, Chapter 6 - Welcome to Washington

“Foreshadowing Strategic Pan-Ethnic Politics: Asian American Campaign Finance Activity in Varying Multicultural Contexts”

Wendy K. Tam Cho, State Politics & Policy Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 273-294

March 27, Week 10 - 9/11 Islamophobia, and Anti-Muslim Policy

Paper 2 Due

This week seeks to contextualize US-Middle Eastern relations within the framework of Orientalism and Exclusion, summarizing the history of US intervention in the region as both a legacy of British Imperialism and driven by economics of fossil fuel dependency. Topics will include the origins of Islamophobia within conservative think-tanks, contemporary advocacy efforts around Middle Eastern refugees and the Muslim Travel Ban, Asian Muslims, and solidarity between AAPI and Muslim American populations.

Reading:

“American Muslims, before and after September 11, 2001”

Karen Leonard, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 37, No. 24

The 9/11 Generation: Youth, Rights, and Solidarity in the War on Terror

Sunaina Marr Maira, Chapter 2 The New Civil Rights Movement

Apr 3, Week 11 – Refugee Resettlement and Southeast Asian Advocacy

***Guest Speaker Naroen Chhin**

Following the American intervention in Vietnam War and subsequent withdrawal of troops in 1975 a refugee crisis emerged on a scale that had not been seen since the second world war. The lecture will focus on the various activist organizations that emerged from this era, as well as the ongoing struggle to combat the deportation of this class of migrants. Cambodian American community organizer and small business owner Naroen Chhin will give a guest lecture about related topics from a local focus, including personal anecdotes about his advocacy work in the Southeast Asian American communities.

Readings:

Asian American Dreams

Helen Zia, Chapter 10 - Reinventing Our Culture

“The Waves of War: Immigrants, Refugees, and New Americans from Southeast Asia”

Carl L. Bankston III and Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo, Contemporary Asian American, Chapter 5

The Misrepresented Minority: New Insights on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

Tracy Lachina Buenavista & Angela Chuan-Ru Chen, A Counter-Story of an Undocumented Asian American College Student (available via Google Books Preview)

“America is Ignoring a Huge Part of Trump’s Crackdown on Immigrants”

Melissa Hung, Huffington Post 11/21/2018

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/southeast-asian-immigrant-deportation_us_5bf43252e4b0d9e7283d855f

“Fix ’96: End the Mass Criminalization of Immigrants”

<https://www.immigrantdefenseproject.org/fix-96-end-mass-criminalization-immigrants/>

Apr 10, Week 12 - Authenticity, Appropriation, and Advocacy in Entertainment Industry
This week's lecture will provide a primer on the complex conversation around authenticity and appropriation through the lens of Asian American media advocacy. Topics will include the history of yellowface on stage and screen, negative stereotyping, Hollywood whitewashing, cultural appropriation, and media activism.

Readings:

"The Untold Story of Asian Americans in Hollywood"

Pacific Citizen, Rob Buscher

<https://www.pacificcitizen.org/the-untold-story-of-asian-americans-in-early-hollywood/>

Asian American Dreams

Helen Zia, Chapter 5 - Gangsters, Gooks, Geishas, and Geeks

Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance

Krystyn R. Moon, Introduction & Imagining China: Early Nineteenth-Century Writings and Musicals (available via Google Books preview)

Screening Asian Americans

Stephen Gong, A History in Progress: Asian American Media Centers, 1970-1990 (available via Google Books Preview)

Apr 17, Week 13 – Asian American Internet Activism and Commercialization of Protest
This week will explore the increasing presence of Asian American activists in online spaces, particularly with regards to reshaping racial discourse to move beyond a black-white binary, in addition to the and the toxicity that exists within Internet culture. Additional topics will include the role that capitalism plays in co-opting activist causes, effectively mainstreaming causes for the purpose of consumer consumption.

Readings:

"How It Feels to Be Viral Me: Affective Labor and Asian American YouTube Performance"

Christine Bacarezza Balance, Women's Studies Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 1/2, pp. 138-152

The Routledge Companion to Asian American Media

Lori Kido Lopez, Asian America Gone Viral: A Genealogy of Asian American YouTubers and Memes (available via Google Books Preview)

Film: ***Uploaded: the Asian American Movement*** (2012) dir. Kane Diep | 72 mins
(<https://youtu.be/1fOwijRIVqM>)

April 24, Week 14 - Miscellaneous Activist Causes

Reflection Journal Due

This week will serve as an opportunity to wrap up loose ends in the curriculum, discussing emerging activist causes and other subjects that have not been explored in depth. Topics may include AAPIs in the LGBTQ movement, Pacific Islanders contributions to environmental discourse, and AAPI intersectionality within the disability rights movement.

May 1, Week 15 - Final Presentations

Students will take turns presenting their 8-10 minute final presentations.