

**Introduction to
Asian American Literature**
ENGL 65. Fall 2004: Tuesday and Thursday 2:40-3:55pm

Prof. Bakirathi Mani
Swarthmore College
Office Hours. Tues/Thurs 1:00-2:30pm, and by appt., LPAC 307

How does “Asian American” operate as a highly contested category of ethnic and national identity? This course examines literature, film, and critical essays by contemporary Asian American writers in order to examine the development of Asian America as a literary field. While the course covers a diverse range of Asian immigrant histories, we will pay specific attention to the formation of Asian American subjectivities across axes of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class. Readings will be organized both chronologically and in response to a series of thematic issues, including:

- ❖ Asian American racial formation
- ❖ Gendered narratives of immigration
- ❖ Queering Asian America
- ❖ The changing face (and space) of Asian America

The objective of this class is to examine the literary formation and political import of the category “Asian American”. The novels, short stories, plays and films we will study in this class map an ongoing movement in Asian American studies from domesticated narratives of immigrant assimilation towards increasingly transnational categories of nationhood and citizenship.

Required Texts

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictee
Frank Chin, Chickencoop Chinaman and the Year of the Dragon
David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly
Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior
Jhumpa Lahiri, Interpreter of Maladies
Chang-Rae Lee, Native Speaker
Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts
Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine
Monica Truong, The Book of Salt
Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Blu's Hanging

All readings marked (☐) are available on Blackboard under “Course Documents”.
All required textbooks and films are on course reserve at McCabe Library.

Course Assignments and Requirements

We will be reading, on average, one literary text per week for this class. Each Tuesday, I will begin our discussion of the novel, play, critical essays, etc with a brief synopsis and provide topics for discussion. Each Thursday, we will conclude our discussion of the novel with a class discussion facilitated by a student. As such, your oral participation in class is as equally important as your written assignments.

In-class presentations

Each of you will be required to make at least one in-class presentation during the course of the semester. In addition to a brief synopsis of the readings, you are responsible for generating questions for discussion and, if you'd like, organizing a group project (small group discussions, role-playing, etc). Your presentation should be 20 – 30 minutes long. Use this opportunity to extend some of the conversations that we have been having in class, or raise new topics of discussion. Please feel free to come by my office hours to discuss your presentation further.

Mid-term exam

I will provide 3 questions for the mid-term exam, from which you should respond to 1. The mid-term will be a take-home essay exam, of 6-8 pages in length.

Final paper

The final 12 page paper will be on any aspect of Asian American studies, with reference to at least two literary or cinematic texts that we have discussed in class. I will schedule a deadline for project proposals, as well as additional office hours towards the end of the semester, for each of you to discuss your proposed topics with me.

Attendance

This class will operate only through your consistent attendance and sustained participation in class. Any more than two unexcused absences will result in a lower grade.

Deadlines

All written assignments are due at the beginning of each class. All deadlines are strictly adhered to; *no extensions or incompletes* will be given. Late papers will be marked down *each day* that they are late (thus, a B instead of a B+).

Final Grade

The total course grade will be calculated through general class participation (10%), the mid-term examination (25%), in-class presentations (30%), and the final paper (35%). Incompletes will not be accepted, and final grades are not negotiable.

Course Schedule

8/31 Historical Formations of Asian America

Introduction

9/2 📖 Frank Chin, et al. AIIIEEEE! (selections)

9/7 Frank Chin, Chickencoop Chinaman

9/9 Rogers and Hammerstein, dir. Flower Drum Song

9/14 Fictions of Immigration

Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine (1-121)

9/16 Bharati Mukherjee, Jasmine (122-241)

📖 Susan Koshy, "The Geography of Female Subjectivity"

📖 Selections from Joan Lee, ed. Asian American

9/21 Memory and Migration

Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior (1-111)

9/23 Maxine Hong Kingston, The Woman Warrior (112-209)

Julia Kwan, dir. Three Sisters on Moon Lake

9/28 Asian American Sexualities

Deborah Gee, dir. Slaying the Dragon

📖 Robert Lee, Orientalism: Introduction and Chap. 5

9/30 📖 Sharon Lim-Hing, ed. The Very Inside: selections by Shah, Lakhana, Mootoo, Chen, Deza, and Anonymous

📖 Russell Leong, ed. Asian American Sexualities: selections by Chung et al., Tsang, Tan

📖 David Eng, "Queerness and Diaspora in Asian American Studies"

Stuart Gaffney, dir. Transgressions (5min., in-class)

10/5 Orientalizing the Orient

David Henry Hwang, M. Butterfly (Acts I and II)

10/7 David Henry Hwang, dir. M. Butterfly (Act III)

📖 Dorinne Kondo, About Face. Essays on "M. Butterfly: Gender, Orientalism, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity" and "Interview with David Henry Hwang"

10/8-10/18 FALL BREAK

10/19 Mid-Term Essays Due

Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts. "Immigration, Citizenship, Racialization: Asian American Critique"

10/21 Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts. "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences"

📖 Lisa Lowe, "Epistemological Shifts"

10/26 Geographies of Violence

Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Blu's Hanging (1-136)

10/28 Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Blu's Hanging (137-260)

☞ Kandice Chuh, "(dis)owning America"

11/2 Native Tongues

Chang-Rae Lee, Native Speaker (1-171)

11/4 Chang-Rae Lee, Native Speaker (172-349)

11/9 Postcolonial Asian America

Jhumpa Lahiri, Interpreter of Maladies

"A Temporary Matter", "Interpreter of Maladies", "Sexy", "This Blessed House"

11/11 Jhumpa Lahiri, Interpreter of Maladies

"When Mr. Pirzada Came To Dine", "Mrs. Sen's", "The Third and Final Continent"

☞ Lata Mani and Ruth Frankenberg, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk"

11/16 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictée (1-89)

11/18 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Dictée (90-179)

☞ Kandice Chuh, "Imaginary Borders"

11/23 Gail Dolgin and Vincent Franco, dir. Daughter From Danang

11/25 Thanksgiving Break

11/30 (Trans)national Narratives

Monica Truong, The Book of Salt (1-133)

12/2 Monica Truong, The Book of Salt (134-261)

12/7 Helen Lee, dir. Prey

Presentation and discussion of final paper topics

Final Papers Due Tuesday Dec. 14 at 5pm