

## **“Alien Encounters”: Asian Americans in Literature and Popular Media**

Instructor: Najwa Mayer

Term: Summer 2017 Session B

Location: TBA

Office Hours: TBA

### Course Description

In this course, we will explore literature and popular media performances by Asian Americans, 1945-present, in relationship to their historical contexts. We will consider the changing ideas of “Asian American” as a category that both *represents* and *makes* culture. This will also require attention to moving ideas of race, class, gender, sexuality, and citizenship. We will use a cultural studies approach to read and compare a variety of genres, including the novel, short story, television, standup comedy, and websites.

Breakdown of course objectives:

- 1) Understanding how “Asian American” identities become produced, represented, and contested through spaces of culture, like literature and media.
- 2) Critically engaging cultural texts through ideas presented in supplemental theoretical/historical readings.
- 3) Applying a cultural studies model to the analysis and comparison of multi-genre texts. This will involve attention to: genre, historical context, authorship, audience, and circulation.
- 4) Writing analytical papers that apply some of these cultural studies methods to the investigation of texts.

### Evaluation

- 30% Participation: includes attendance, thoughtful discussion, and presenting questions to the class for one week’s readings
- 30% Weekly Responses: A two-page analysis of one text, every week, focusing on at least one of the analytical methods of cultural studies (genre, history, audience, etc.)
- 30% Final Paper: a 10-page comparative essay focusing on two or more primary cultural texts (from the course or outside), using at least 2 secondary sources of your choosing
- 10% Presentation: present topic of your final paper to class

### Week 1: War and memory

Tuesday

- *Recommended* reading: Robert G. Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* and Elaine Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to Writings and Their Social Context*
- In-class introduction to key ideas, themes, and histories (*Powerpoint on classes\*v2*)

Thursday

- Reading 1: John Okada, *No-No Boy* (selections)
- Reading 2: National Japanese American Memorial Foundation Website ([www.njamf.com](http://www.njamf.com))
- In-class images: Ruth Asawa, artist

*Preliminary Syllabus: A revised copy will be distributed on the first day of class*

## Week 2: Immigrant acts

Tuesday

- Reading 1: Carlos Bulosan, *America is in the Heart* (selections)
- Reading 2: Rachel C. Lee, "Fraternal Devotions: Carlos Bulosan and the Sexual Politics of America"

Thursday

- Reading 1: Thi Diem Thuy Le, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (selections)
- Reading 2: Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* (selections)
- In-class clips: from *Paris by Night* in Orange County, California

## Week 3: Re-orienting bodies

Tuesday

- Reading 1: Maxine Hong Kingston, *Woman Warrior* (selections)
- Reading 2: Rachel C. Lee, *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation* (selections)
- In-class clips: from the standup performances of Margaret Cho

Thursday

- Reading: Harjant Gill, "How Milind Soman Made Me Gay: Exploring Issues of Belonging and Citizenship amongst Gay South Asian Men in Diaspora"
- Viewing (on your own): Harjant Gill, *Milind Soman Made Me Gay* (available online and at the Film Center)

## Week 4: Margins, mainstreams, and extremes

Tuesday

- Reading: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Dictee* (selections)
- Reading 2: Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* (selections)
- In-class clips: Helen Lee, *Prey* (short film) and Nahnatchka Khan, *Fresh Off the Boat* (tv show)

Thursday

- Reading 1: Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (selections)
- Reading 2: Leti Volpp, *The Citizen and the Terrorist*
- In-class clips: Joshua Safran, *Quantico* (tv show)

## Week 5: New and familiar encounters

Tuesday

- Reading 1: Mimi Thi Nguyen, *Evolution of a Race Riot* (punk rock zine available online: <https://issuu.com/poczineproject/docs/evolution-of-a-race-riot-issue-1>)
- Reading 2: Mimi Thi Nguyen, *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America* (selections on classes\*v2)
- In-class clips: from riot grrrl punk performances

Thursday

- In-class presentations of final paper topics