HIST 213: Asian Americans in US History
From the Yellow Peril to Harold and Kumar

Professor Oda
MSS 211
Office Hours: W 12-1, Th 2-4
mereditho@unr.edu
(775) 784-6124

Course Description

This course considers Asian migrations and communities in the United States from the mid-19th century to the present. Asians in the United States have lived within the framework of the American political economy as well as international events, actions, and ideas. These include local socioeconomic conditions in Asia as well as war, commerce, and colonialism, all of which informed identity, family, labor, and community formations in the US.

This transnational perspective will frame our examination of the migrations, labor, communities, and representations of Asian Americans. To some extent the class will be chronological, examining the sending countries, emigrations, and experiences of different Asian migrant groups. However, we will also consider continuities and similarities across time and groups, in addition to considering how that identity of a “group” was constructed and articulated. Gender, ethnic difference, national identity, and sexuality will be discussed in order to further help us complicate our analysis of the history of Asian Americans.

Students will bring together these ideas and questions in order to develop their own nuanced understanding of the narrative of and questions of Asian American history. Explorations of fiction, film, memoir, visual media, and primary documents will aid the students in this regard. Through the assigned readings, essays, discussion-board posts, class discussion, and group activities, students will hone skills in communication and critical thinking useful for other courses and in professional contexts.

Core Objectives
This course satisfies Core Objectives 10 and 11 of the Silver Core Curriculum:

CO10. Diversity & Equity
Students will develop a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate attentiveness to and analysis of diversity and equity.

CO11. Global Contexts
Students will apply and evaluate modes of academic inquiry, creative expression, or results of research to problems in historical and contemporary global contexts. Students will articulate connections among local, national, and international contexts and evaluate the ways that historical and contemporary global influences affect their current situations.
This course also helps students to develop the skills described in Core Objectives 1 and 3 of the Silver Core Curriculum. These objectives are reinforced throughout the curriculum in other courses students take to fulfill core and major requirements:

**CO1. Effective Composition and Communication**
Students will be able to effectively compose written, oral, and multimedia texts for a variety of scholarly, professional, and creative purposes.

**CO3. Critical Analysis and Use of Information**
Students will be critical consumers of information, able to engage in systematic research processes, frame questions, read critically, and apply observational and experimental approaches to obtain information.

**Skills-Based Curriculum**

The history program at UNR helps students to develop proficiency in broadly applicable skills while mastering specific subject areas. In addition to learning about Asian Americans in US history, students will have been able to practice and improve the following skills in this course:

- critical thinking (through reading and analyzing written documents and cultural sources, formulating arguments supported by historical evidence, and organizing information in a clear and logical manner)
- historical research (through finding information about historical topics in the final research project)
- written communication (through writing short assignments, a research presentation, and a research project)
- primary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented historical documents and cultural artifacts created during the time periods we are studying)
- secondary source analysis (through reading and identifying the key points, meaning, and significance of arguments and ideas presented in books and articles written by scholars about the time period we are studying)
- cultural text analysis (through thinking about the significance of cultural texts such as news reports, magazine articles, music, and films and placing them in historical context)
- oral expression (through small group and whole class discussions and student presentations)

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Students who have successfully completed this course will be able to:

1. explain the influence of Asian migration and experiences on US national identity and history (CO10)
2. critically examine the migrations between Asia and the United States in dialogue with global processes such as war, trade, and colonialism (CO11, CO10)
3. identify, analyze, and interpret the connections between events and ideas in Asia and the conditions of Asians in the United States (CO3, CO10, CO11)
4. analyze and interpret primary sources in different forms, including documents, film, popular media, photographs, and autobiography (CO3)
5. critically read and analyze secondary sources for the argument, main points, and use of evidence (CO3)
6. frame an original historical research question as well as find and use historical sources to answer it (CO1, CO3)
7. present ideas in an effective and organized manner in written and oral formats (CO1, CO3)

Class procedures

This class will be a combination of discussion, lecture, and group activities. Your contributions are therefore critical to the class. In order for you to properly contribute, you’ll need to carefully read all of the assigned readings before the class they will be discussed. All assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due date.

Assessment

Participation (15% of your grade)
SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
This class will include lecture and discussion every day. Therefore, your attendance and active participation is important. Your participation grade will reflect attendance, individual contributions to discussions, and your work in group activities.

Short Essays (10 points each, 40%)
SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
Due: Weeks 4, 8, 11, and 16
There will be three 3-page essays that analyze the readings and apply the ideas raised in class. Your essay should also demonstrate good writing: it should be structured by an argument and supported with evidence from the primary sources, secondary sources, and class lectures. We will go over several of the strongest essays and address general writing strategies to help you develop your writing skills over the course of the semester.

Discussion-Board Posts (5 points each, 20%)
SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 6
100-150 words on the class Webcampus site. You will be responsible for one response each week except in weeks with an essay due. You can choose to respond to the readings of either day but the post is due by midnight the night before the reading is due for class. You will be assessed for the development and articulation of ideas in response to the readings; these should be clearly written and edited for grammatical errors but do not have to follow a formal essay format. Each post will be graded out of a possible 5 points. More information on Webcampus.

Biography Essay (25% points total)
SLOs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
1-page proposal due: Week 7 (5%)
3-4 page draft due: Week 14 (there is a penalty of one letter grade if you do not have one.)
Oral presentation: Week 15 (5%)
Final 7-8 page paper due: Final class meeting (15%)
The essay will situate an individual’s experiences in the context of the topics and themes we’ve seen over the course of the semester. The source will be a memoir, a transcribed oral history, or an interview that you conduct on your own. Your subject does not necessarily need to self-identify as an Asian American, but their story should be directly relatable to the themes we’ve seen during the semester. We will spend part of several classes addressing the research and writing process, and the project will include a 5-minute oral presentation on your findings.

Grading Criteria

The Plus/Minus system of grading applies in this course.

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Late papers will be accepted with a 1/3 of a grade deduction for each day it is late (an A will go down to an A-, a B+ to a B, etc.). The best way to avoid this is to plan ahead: if you have other significant commitments (for example, another midterm scheduled the same day) that will not allow you turn in your best work, let me know ahead of time to set an alternate deadline for the essay. If you miss the agreed-upon deadline, of course, the grade deduction will apply. If an unexpected emergency arises, such as a major illness or family emergency, let me know as soon as possible and we will reschedule an assignment.

Essay Quality Guidelines

A is an exceptional grade reserved for work of exceptional quality. This grade is for essays that have all the qualities of the B essay, and in addition are well written and display analytical skills and/or originality. The last two criteria are extremely important. A essays do not merely summarize material from the readings or lectures. In addition, ideas must be expressed clearly, no matter how insightful or interesting they are.

B denotes work that is above average in quality. It demonstrates that the student knows and understands the material covered in class and being analyzed, and that s/he is capable of synthesizing it into a competent essay. It is accurate, detailed, and well organized, with an introduction, an argument, and a conclusion. Usually, either writing problems or a lack of analysis is what prevents a B essay from being an A.

C is given for work that is average. The student shows familiarity with the material, answers the central questions posed, and is mostly accurate, but lacks the sophistication of either the B or A student. The C essay might make general points but fail to support them with specific evidence or details, or it might have problems with organization or writing style. Sometimes a C essay is merely a collection of facts, with no coherent theme or thesis.

D is given for work that is inadequate. It omits important points, contains more than a few inaccuracies, and is badly organized. It is does not answer the central questions posed in the assignment. It suggests one of three things: 1) the student has barely been paying attention to the course, 2) s/he has problems understanding the material, 3) s/he has problems expressing ideas in
writing. If you think you have been trying hard and receive a D grade for a writing assignment, please come and discuss it with me.

**Statement on Academic Dishonesty**

“Cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses” constitute academic dishonesty according to the code of this university. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and penalties can include canceling a student’s enrollment without a grade, giving an F for the course or for the assignment. For more details, see the UNR General Catalog.

**Statement on Disability Services**

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 101) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

**The Department of History Writing Center**

I encourage you to get help with your essays at the Department of History’s writing center, MSS 109. Drop-in hours are MW 9am-1pm and Th 1-5pm, or you can contact Tim Smith (tpsmith@unr.edu) to set up an appointment. More information about the center is available on Webcampus.

**Required Texts**


* Additional required readings are available for download on WebCampus.

We will also screen two full-length feature films on Wed. 10/22 and Wed. 11/19, locations to be determined. If you cannot make the screening due to a work- or class-schedule conflict, the films are available on reserve at the library’s media center.
Course Calendar

Week 1
Introduction to the Class

Yellow Power! The Activist Origins of Asian American History

Early Migrations: “By Way of Commerce and Conquest”

Week 2
Labor Day (no class)

The American and Global Context of Asian Emigrations
- Major Problems, chapter 2: documents 1-8, Chen essay.

Week 3
Transnational Networks, the American West, and Chinese Migration

“The Chinese Must Go!”: The Rise of Exclusion

Week 4
Living With and Contesting Exclusion
- Major Problems, chapter 4: Wong and Ngai essays.

Exclusion Continued* Essay 1 due

Week 5
Japan and Korea: Colonialism and Migration

Plantation Life in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i
- Bulosan, America is in the Heart, chapters VII-XII.
Week 6
Colonialism and Migrations from the Philippines and India
- Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, chapters XIII-XIX, XXV.

Colonialism, Commerce, and Migrations
- Bulosan, *America is in the Heart*, part XXVI-XXVIII, XXX

Week 7
Orientalism and Popular Culture *Proposal due*

Prewar Life and Labors
- Bulosan, *American is in the Heart*, XXXVIII-XLII.

Wars in Asia and Asian Americans

Week 8
The Pacific War and Japanese American Internment

The Pacific War and Asian American Citizenship *Essay 2*
- *“How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,”* *Time Magazine*, 21 Dec. 1941.

Week 9
Making the American Family Global and Cosmopolitan: War Brides & Adoption

The Possibilities and Perils of the Cold War in Asia *Meet at 6-9 pm, location TBA*
- film: *Go For Broke* (1951)
- *Major Problems*, chapter 10: documents 1, 2.

Week 10
The Possibilities and Perils of the Cold War in Asia
- *Major Problems*, chapter 10: documents 4 and 8, de Vera and Zhao essays.

The Emergence of the Model Minority: Asian Americans as “Success Stories”

Week 11
Yellow Power! (continued) The Asian American Movement

1965 and New Migration from Asia *Essay 3*
- *Major Problems*, chapter 11: documents 1-3, 8; Choy essay.

**Continuities, Reconfigurations, Departures: Postwar Constructions of Asian America**

**Week 12**
War in Southeast Asia and Refugee Migration

Japan and the New Yellow Peril

**Week 13**
Asian Americans and Current Immigration Debates

Asian Americans in Contemporary Culture *Meet at 6-9 pm, location TBA*

**Week 14**
Rough-Draft Workshop *Rough draft due*

Thesis and Evidence

**Week 15**
Final Essay Presentations

Final Essay Presentations

**Week 16**
The Status of Asian America Today *Essay 4*
Bring in a piece of contemporary culture — a magazine article, song, film clip, commercial, cartoon, image, etc. — and some ideas about what you think it says about Asian Americans and their place in American society and culture. Does it reflect or complicate the history we’ve
learned during the semester? Does it suggest a new direction or theme that we haven’t addressed?

**Final Meeting Week**

*Final essay due*

Turn in the essay and shared one challenge in the research process and how you addressed it.