

LIT310 Social Issues in Asian American Literature

1st and 2nd quarters, Junior

Instructor	Nicolangelo Becce, Ph.D.
Style of Class	Seminar
Number of Credits	2
Day and Period	To be advised

Course Description

The term *Asian American* was coined at the end of the 1960s after the Civil Rights Movement in the United States to include, under a single label, all the American citizens of Asian ancestry. This label has strong political and cultural connotations, because it strategically tries to represent, from a white American point of view, the alleged unity and substantial homogeneity of a group of people composed of various ethnic communities with their own specific histories, languages, cultures and religions.

While during their past history they have often been against each other in very hostile terms, in the United States of America all the Asian Americans share (although with specific differences) a common history of immigration, economic oppression and racial discrimination. The Asian American literary production describes such a complex cultural and social experience in which writers continuously negotiate their own identity within the communities they belong to and the United States at large, thus exploring linguistic, racial, generational, social, gender and economic issues in a historical context that has often evolved at a dramatically fast pace.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- 1) analyze Asian American literary texts within their historical, cultural, social and political contexts;
- 2) focus on questioning the multifaceted identities of Asian Americans;
- 3) explore gender-related issues in the Asian American literary production;
- 4) experience how literary and cultural texts can transform one's perception and understanding of self, other and communities;
- 5) become familiar with the act of interpreting literary texts through appropriate theoretical and methodological tools, acknowledging alternative interpretations and developing critical thinking.

Prerequisites

None

Class Materials

Reading and study materials will be distributed in class.

Course Methods

The teaching method used in this course will follow a seminar style. Students will be encouraged to contribute, with personal observations, to in-class discussion based on the reading assignments. The instructor will start from the in-class discussion to develop brief and informal lectures based on the assigned readings and the students' questions and observations

Evaluation/Assessment

Students will write response papers to either one of the readings or a combination of readings. While not formal pieces of academic writing, these response papers will describe the readings' main arguments, the student's personal current thinking (including confusion) and will offer at least one

question for class discussion. At the end of the course, students will write a final paper in which they can analyze any aspect of Asian American literature in general and of the texts discussed in class. Each student will present her/his paper to the class at the end of the course.

Grading

30%	Participation and In-class Discussions
30%	Weekly Response Papers
30%	Final Paper
10%	Final Paper Presentation

Course Schedule

Week 1 : Introduction to Course

Introduction to Asian American Literature and Its Historical Background.

Week 2: From Asians to Asian Americans

In-class discussion on the first major wave of Asian immigration in the United States (1850s ~1920s) from a historical, political and economic perspective.

Week 3: Different Viewpoints: Early Asian American Writers

In-class discussion on the first examples of Asian American literary production, from autobiographical accounts of the lives and traditions they left behind to poetical descriptions of the harsh living conditions in the United States.

Week 4: "No Orientals Allowed": World War II and the Internment Experience

In-class discussion on the literary response to the dramatic events related to World War II and the relocation experience that Japanese Americans had to endure.

Week 5: AIIIEEEEE!!!: Civil Rights Movements and Asian American Activism

In-class discussion on the role of Asian American literature in the 1960s and 70s to condemn the discriminations suffered and as a weapon of political activism.

Week 6: Caught Between Two Worlds: The 80's and 90's

In-class discussion on the demographic, social and ideological heterogeneity of Asian Americans in the 1980s and 90s, and the explosion of new self-representation instances that occurred in the contemporary literary production.

Week 7: Recent Developments in Asian American Literature

In-class discussion on the recent trends in Asian American literature and literary criticism at the turn of the twenty-first century.

Weeks 8-9: Men, Women and Silence: Asian Americans and Gender Issues (Week 8: End of Quarter 1)

In-class discussion on the literary representations of the challenges against patriarchal ideology that historically characterizes Asian American families.

Weeks 10-11: Rebels and Heroines: Asian Americans, Class and Race

In-class discussion on the racial and class discriminations suffered by Asian Americans, with a special focus on how these issues are addressed by Asian American writers in their literary production.

Weeks 12-13: Asian American Literature From a Transnational Perspective

In-class discussion on the role of Asian American culture and literature as an integral part of the United States national identity and, at the same time, as a supranational, intercultural and productively deconstructive entity.

Weeks 14-15: Class Presentations of Final Papers

Week 16: Conclusions (End of Quarter 2)

Course / instructor evaluation

Preparation and Follow-up

- Preparation: Read the relevant portions of the reference materials (about one hour)
- Follow-up: Review the content of the lecture and note any points you are not sure of (about one hour)