

Migrant Geographies: Between Asia and the United States in the Twentieth Century

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Course Description

This seminar uses histories between Asia and the United States to illuminate one of the most urgent issues of our time: the relationship between borders, human mobility, and society. From the mid-nineteenth century, migration between Asia and the United States changed the landscapes of both regions and redefined the lives of millions of migrants. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, many countries and empires feared an “Asiatic invasion” and barred or restricted many Asian migrants. This seminar analyzes this global manifestation of ‘closed’ borders. Moving across histories of migration that tie into indigenous, black, and other migrant histories, this seminar expands our understanding of what constitutes “the border,” and highlights not only how borders were forged but the way in which they made and remade migrant lives. It traces the multidirectional trajectories of migrants between Asia, U.S. colonies in the Pacific and the settler-colony itself, and delineates processes of border making that defined the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The readings for each week enunciate the forms of border making this seminar explores which include but are not limited to: deportation, documentation, public health concerns, gender and sexuality, and borderlands.

Moreover, while this seminar largely focuses on migration between Asia and the U.S., it engages wider intellectual concerns related to border making, race, law, and gender that exceed the history of any specific community or region. Critical questions in this course include: What are the various methodological approaches to studying and situating histories of migration and border making? What constitutes a border? How do critical histories related to race, class, gender, and disability transform our understanding of immigration policy and border enforcement?

Through shared in-class discussion, reading responses, and assignments, this seminar will prepare students to better analyze the vexed relationship of borders and migration from a variety of perspectives. Rather than a comprehensive survey course, we will examine specific cases to explicate the relationship between human movement and border making. Course readings are grouped thematically. Primary materials, including poetry, immigration processing documents, legal cases, and photographs, will also complement secondary readings.

Students from all areas and disciplines are welcome and encouraged to enroll. Students interested in ethnic studies, histories of migration, critical race studies, critical legal studies, and gender may find this course particularly useful as they develop their interests. No prior knowledge of the course’s content is required. This class will meet for 2 hours and 45 minutes every week in a seminar format.

Evaluation & Requirements:

In-class participation and attendance: 20%

Reading responses: 20%

Multi-media assignment: 25%

Final essay: 35%

Reading/Writing Assignments

100-150 pgs. reading per week. Brief weekly responses; one multi-media assignment; final paper related to course readings.

Course Assignments

The objective of this seminar is to deeply engage with complex ideas related to border and migration studies. Students will use that knowledge to produce well-researched and well-reasoned weekly responses, midterm assignments, and final papers. By the end of the course students will learn how to recognize and evaluate how historians ask questions, use and contextualize primary sources, construct an argument or narrative, and enter scholarly conversations with originality on a specific theme or concept.

Students are encouraged to visit the Bok Center for Teaching and Learning and the History Department's Writing Fellow in the process of writing their papers. All assignments must be uploaded to Canvas with no exceptions. Penalties apply for late submissions: 5% docked for each day it is late. Extensions will only be granted with a Resident Dean's note or that of a medical practitioner.

Class Participation

Class participation is an essential part of a seminar. Participation entails more than just attendance. You are expected to come to each class ready to discuss the assigned material. As such, contributions to class discussions in the form of thoughtful, productive comments or questions are an essential part of your engagement. This architecture of engagement also requires being mindful of the room's engagement and your peers. It is our role as class participants to be mindful of how we speak during and between our seminar sessions. Allowing voices to be heard means raising our own while also being conscious of when to moderate it to create spaces for your peers. Please be mindful of the strength and the reach of your voice, as well as that of others. If you are hesitant to speak in class, please see me on enrollment so we can discuss the matter and, if need be, come to alternate arrangements. Your voice matters to me and I am always happy to find a platform for it where you feel safe.

Reading Responses

The study of border and migration studies is a complex topic which often moves across disciplines and theoretical frameworks. For this reason, students will submit a response paper no longer than one-page (double-spaced) 24 hours before each class period. Guiding questions are shared herein for each week. These responses are not summaries of the week's readings. Rather, they give you the opportunity to reflect on the week's readings through practices of close readings of particular excerpts from the text. When writing responses, please provide page numbers and authors last names when referring to specific texts. I will use these responses to gauge your understanding of our course materials as well as your progress in the course. These post are also an opportunity for you to pose any questions about the readings for clarification or explanation.

Midterm Assignment

Using a primary source related to any of the readings we have completed thus far provide a non-written narrative related to the history of migrant geographies and border-making it tells. Our course focuses on writing assignments through weekly responses and a final paper but for this specific assignment, please engage critically with how people and states frame and experience “the border” through your primary source. The goal of this assignment is reflective, imaginative, and creative. This includes how you think of “migrant geographies” and “border making.” Assignments may take the form of short media presentations including video (no longer than 7 minutes), skits and plays (no longer than 15 minutes, pamphlets and posters, poetry, etc. Students are encouraged to research primary sources in the form of architectural landscapes, photographs, memoirs, speeches, state files, correspondence, memoirs, and so on. If you have difficulty finding a primary source related to a specific topic you would like to work on, please email me. In addition to guiding you to specific sources, I have a collection of materials from which you can choose. Students are also encouraged to visit me in office hours more generally as their projects develop. Midterm assignments are due in Week 7 at any point the week but by midnight on Friday (EST).

Final Essay

Your final assignment is a well-researched and well-reasoned final paper that is historiographical in nature (I will elaborate more on this in class). Each student can choose a historical or contemporary issue of concern or one that has been previously discussed in the course if they develop it in a new direction. If you have trouble selecting a topic, please see me in office hours. After introducing the topic, explain the way in which it is discussed across the readings of our course. You do not need to engage every reading but only ones that are relevant to your paper. Essays should be between 12-15 double-spaced pages, and include a bibliography consisting of primary and secondary sources that relate directly to the project. Through the course, we may discuss the final assignment and if students choose we may alter its form. Final assignments are due a week after our course closes.

Academic Honesty

Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.

Plagiarism is the deliberate or unintentional use of another person’s words, ideas, or work without proper acknowledgment or citation. It also includes falsifying information and submitting the same paper for different classes without permission and other infractions. All incidents of plagiarism will be forwarded to the Honor Board. For further information on plagiarism, please consult the university’s academic handbook and the [Office of Academic Integrity and Academic Dishonesty](#).

Disability and Medical Reprieve

Harvard University facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities.

All accommodations are coordinated through Harvard University Disability Services. You can visit the [HUDS Website here](#).

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak with the professor by the end of the second week of the term. Failure to do so may result in the Course Head's inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although Faculty are invited to contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation. I am available to assist you in every way but I will need you to initiate the conversation.

Course Readings

1. An Introduction

We will begin our course by foregrounding the idea of “Asian American” not simply as a form of identity but also as a field of study. What were the key distinctions of this “field” (or not) and the sorts of questions and concerns that have been central to its development?

Erika Lee, “Introduction,” *The Making of Asian America: A History*

Lisa Lowe, “Chapter 2, Canon, Institutionalization, Identity: Asian American Studies,” *Immigrant Acts*

Kandice Chuh, “It’s Not About Anything,” *Social Text*, 2014, Vol.32(4), pp. 125-134.

Eve Tuck & K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.

Mary Pat Brady, “Border” in Key Words for American Cultural Studies.

2. Why and How They Migrate

Migration between Asia and the U.S. was multidirectional and emerged in different historical contexts. What were the imperial contexts in which people left their home regions? What sorts of imaginaries of the U.S. did they migrate with?

Madeline Y. Hsu, “California Dreaming: Migration and Dependency,” in *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*

Kornel Chang, “Contracting Between Empires: Imperial Labor Circuits in the Pacific,” *Pacific Connections: The Making of the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands*

Yen Le Espiritu, “Chapter 2, Leaving Home: Filipino Migration/Return to the United States,” in *Home Bound: Filipino Lives Across Cultures, Communities and Countries*

3: Asian Migrations & Developments in Border Making

This week’s readings lay out early forms of migration restrictions that impacted Asian migrants. They introduce the global significance of early immigration restrictions related to Asian migrants. How does each author situation the development of border making? Please pay attention to how many of them not only outline border-making techniques but integrate aspects of U.S. colonialism and diplomacy within the Pacific and Asia into their frameworks.

Adam McKeown, “Chapter 5, Experiments in Border Control, 1852-1887,” and “Chapter 9, The American Formula, 1905-1913,” in *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders*

Moon Ho-Jung, “Chapter 1, Outlawing Coolies,” *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation*

Erika Lee, "The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1 April 2002, Vol.21(3), pp.36-62

Primary Source:

Images reproduced in Elliot Young, *Alien Nation: Chinese Migration in the Americas from the Coolie Era to World War II*. You can find these images on [Young's blog here](#).

4. Migrant Contestations of Detention & Deportation

Deportation signifies the state's ability to determine who is quarantined, granted entry, and deported. How did migrants contest detention and deportation? What legal spaces did their efforts play out across?

Nicholas De Genova and Nathalie Peutz, eds., "Introduction," *The Deportation Regime: Sovereignty, Space, and the Freedom of Movement*

Torrie Hester, "Protection, not Punishment": Legislative and Judicial Formation of U.S.

Deportation Policy, 1882-1904" *The Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Fall 2010): 11-36

Lucy Salter, "Chapter 2: Contesting Exclusion," in *Laws as Harsh as Tigers: Chinese Immigrants and the Shaping of Modern Immigration Law*

Kelly Lytle-Hernandez, "Chapter 3: Not Imprisonment in a Legal Sense," in *City of Inmates: Conquest, Rebellion, and the Rise of Human Caging in Los Angeles, 1771-1965*

Primary Source:

Him Mark Lai, Genny Lim, and Judy Yung, *Island: Poetry and History of Chinese Immigrants on Angel Island, 1910-1940* (please feel free to choose any 2-3 poems)

5: Gender, Sex, & Sexuality: The Body as Geography

Migrant geographies were mapped by lines of gender and sexuality that determined who could not only be deported but who was a "suspect" under the law. This included women, men, persons who cannot be so easily historicized through a male-female binary, and those with "transgressive" sexualities. What were the legal constraints related to gender and sexuality Asian migrants encountered? How did they reconfigure migration trajectories?

Nayan Shah, "Race-ing Sex," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 2014, Vol.35(1), pp. 26-36.

Estelle T. Lau, "Chapter 3, Entry Despite Exclusion," *Paper Families: Identity, Immigration Administration, and Chinese Exclusion*

Anne Anlin Cheng, "Chapter 1, Borders and Embroidery," *Ornamentalism*

Eithné Luibheid, "Chapter 3, Birthing a Nation: Race, Ethnicity, and Childbearing," in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*

Primary Source:

Library of Congress, [The Page Act of 1875 \(Sect. 141, 18 Stat. 477, 3 March 1875\)](#).

6. Invasive Bodies: Quarantine, Segregation, & Borderlines

As migrants arrived in the U.S. notions of their health and civilizational standards that linked to ideas of Asia create a series of public health panics. What ideas of Asia, Asian bodies, race, and gender were parts of these public health panics? What role does science and scientific expertise play in the creation and dissemination of "panic"?

Nayan Shah, "Chapter 1, Public Health and the Mapping of a Chinatown," *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown*

Natalia Molina, "Chapter 2, Caught between Discourses of Disease, Health, and Nation: Public Health Attitudes toward Japanese and Mexican Laborers in Progressive-Era Los Angeles," in *Fit to Be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939* (OR) Emily Abel, "'Only the Best Class of Immigration: 'Public Health Policy Towards Mexicans and Filipinos in Los Angeles, 1910-1940,' *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 94, No. 6 (2004): 932-939 (choose one of these two)

Peter Schrag, "Chapter 3, Science Makes Its Case," in *Not Fit for Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America*

Primary Source:

Anne Anlin Cheng, "After Images," *Ornamentalism* (please skim the text and focus on the photographs Cheng has reproduced from Arnold Genthe)

Or Library of Congress, [Official Map of "Chinatown" in San Francisco \(1885\)](#)

7. In Search of Entry Points

As migrants experienced legal bars and restrictions on "legal" entry, many turned to moving across the northern and southern borderlands for entry and even other imperial nodes under U.S. jurisdiction. How do this week's readings redirect our attention to the historical construction of these borderlands? How have migrants moved through and lived in them?

Patrick Ettinger, "Introduction," *Imaginary Lines: Border Enforcement and the Origins of Undocumented Immigration*

Robert Chao Romero, "Transnational Chinese Immigrant Smuggling to the United States via Mexico and Cuba, 1882-1916," *Amerasia Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004/2005): 1-16.

Seema Sohi, excerpts of "Chapter 4, Imperial Immigration Policy, Citizenship, and Ships of Revolution" (only the section titled "Stepping Stones" to the United States: The Philippines Question, p. 117-134), *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*

Primary Source:

[Report of the Boundary Commission upon the Survey and Re-marking of the Boundary between the United States and Mexico West of the Rio Grande, 1891-96](#), University of North Texas Digital Library

Or Hardeep Dhillon, Photography from the Borderland. Please see our Canvas site for some of my own photos of Chinese restaurants and Indian-Mexican families that continue to live on the U.S.-Mexico borderland.

8. Sharing of Midterm Assignments

We will take a break from readings this week and simply share our midterm assignments. The presentations are intended to be casual and conversational.

9. Expulsion & Segregation: Burnings, Shootings, & Drive Outs

Settler colonial violence was an everyday and otherwise experience for many migrants including Asians. These forms of violence included late night drive outs, massacres, shootings, and burnings. They also sent messages of where white settlers believed these migrants belonged. How did such violence unfold and what forms of resistance did migrants embrace?

Beth Lew-Williams, "Introduction," *The Chinese Must Go: Violence, Exclusion and the Making of the Alien in America*

Erika Lee, "The 'Yellow Peril' and Asian Exclusion in the Americas," *Pacific Historical Review*, Nov 2007, Vol.76(4), pp.537-562.

Michael Bottoms, "Every Colored Man is the Victim": Race and the Right to be Heard in California's Courts, 1851-1872," in *An Aristocracy of Race: Race and Reconstruction in California and the West, 1850-1890*

Primary Source:

[The Japanese School Segregation Case No. 4754: In the Supreme Court of the State of California](#)

Additionally, please review your notes from the readings by Nayan Shah and Natalia Molina assigned in previous weeks.

Harper's Weekly Cartoon, "[For Heaven's Sake Do Not Embarrass the Administration](#)," dated Nov. 19, 1906

10. War & Interwar: Quotas, Denaturalization, Alienage, & Border Patrol

During the Great War and in its aftermath, a series of immigration restrictions began to define legal borders in relationship to literacy, eligibility to citizenship, and quotas. The modern U.S. Border Patrol was also formed. Many of these processes unfolded simultaneously. How do we interpret the near simultaneous unfolding of these legalities and their relationship to racial formations?

John Cheng at The Planet Mongo Project, [The "Asiatic Barred Zone"](#)

Mae Ngai, "Introduction" (to p. 12), and "Part I: The Regime of Quotas and Papers," in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*

Ian Haney Lopez, "Chapter 4, Ozawa and Thind," in *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race*

Vivek Bald, "Chapter 2, Between Hindoo and Negro," in *Bengali Harlem and the Lost Histories of South Asian America*

Primary Source:

John Cheng, [Digital Map of the Asiatic Barred Zone](#)

South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), [Bhagat Singh Thind in U.S. Army Uniform](#)

11. World War II & Shifts in Immigration

World War II raised significant concerns about immigrant loyalty, in addition to new concerns related to immigration restrictions that amounted from a changing geopolitical landscape. What were some of the shifts and how did they vary across migrant communities?

Rick Baldoz, "Chapter 5, 'To Guard the Door of My People': Exclusion, Independence, and Repatriation," *The Third Asiatic Invasion: Empire and Migration in Filipino America, 1898-1946*

Jane H. Hong, "Entangling Immigration and Independence Indians and Indian Americans in the Campaign for Exclusion Repeal," *Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion*

Charlotte Brooks, "The War on Grant Avenue: Business Competition and Ethnic Rivalry in San Francisco's Chinatown, 1937-1942," *Journal of Urban History*, May 2011, Vol.37(3), pp. 311-330.

Primary Source:

[Dorothea Lange Gallery](#), National Park Services

The U.S. military seized these photos when they were produced. You can read more about their production and reproduction on [Lens from New York Times](#).

12. Post-War Liberalizations: Geopolitics, the Cold War, & Economies of Labor

Following World War II, new geopolitical concerns related to Asia led to a widespread re-evaluation of immigration policy that was complemented by local organizing by immigrant communities. What did the “opening” of immigration policy mean for migrants and state bureaucrats?

Jane H. Hong, “Chapter 5, Making Repeal Meaningful: Asian Immigration Campaigns during the Civil Rights Era,” *Opening the Gates to Asia: A Transpacific History of How America Repealed Asian Exclusion*

Mae M. Ngai, “Chapter 7, The Liberal Critique and Reform of Immigration Policy,” in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*

Madeline Y. Hsu and Ellen D. Wu, ““Smoke and Mirrors”: Conditional Inclusion, Model Minorities, and the Pre-1965 Dismantling of Asian Exclusion,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, July 2015, Vol.34(4), pp. 43-65.

Primary Source:

Bring an archival source related to border making and COVID-19 to class.