

Yellow Peril ! - Documenting & Understanding Xenophobia

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Seminar: T 4:55 – 7:35, SCA, 20 Cooper Square 4fl

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This is an introductory primary research seminar and everyone will be expected to fully document, analyze, critique, and engage with an artifact of yellow peril/Islamophobia of your choosing. And we'll work collaboratively helping each other out throughout. That will be your project and mandate. In order to do this work, we'll have lots of bizarre fun and need to begin decolonizing, deimperializing, and de-Cold War-ifying our ways of thinking and doing, trained historical frameworks, cultural assumptions, as we're developing new practices and theories to understand what happens and why. It's an ongoing process!

What might your artifact be?

What resources, skills, insights do you bring?

Can you work collaboratively and collectively?

What you'll experience and discover in this seminar should be shared with others who also want to teach, research, discuss, and explore.

First, a bit of background...

Fears of "yellow peril" (and "brown peril," Islamophobia & "Turban tides"), among various other phobias of "others" run deep in the present and past of U.S./Western political and commercial cultures. Its imagery and stories are just beneath the surface of everyday discourse and always latent--readily triggered by an incident, real or fabricated. U.S. Americans, indeed virtually all cultures, are woefully unaware of such shadow traditions, its scapegoating paranoid histories, and consequently vulnerabilities to YP/I's ideological and affective power.

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany is attributed to have coined the term "die gelbe Gefahr" in 1895. We don't know for sure this is true. Saying he dreamed of a menacing Buddha riding a dragon thunderstorm soon to threaten Germania, Britannia, *et. al.*, he gave modern racist form to an old European fear. (So, for example, Japanese expansionists and militarists during the 19th Century sought to counter European colonial land grabs in Asia and the Pacific with their own brand of pan-Asianism, appealing to a racial solidarity defined along Western racial categories, as a way to counter European and U.S. empire building. It's complex indeed!) The most effective embodiment of YP/I phobia is likely the lasting figure of Arthur Henry Ward's "Fu Manchu" caricature (1911). Yet the origins go further back into British settler colonies (Anglo-North American, Australian/New Zealand, South Africa) and European histories. Well before Kaiser Wilhelm, European courts, for example, were both fearful of swooping Mongol "hordes" and Islamic invasions while lured by the fabled riches and exoticism of "the East." Such phobia/philias dynamics extend back to the Greek city-state antagonisms towards the nomadic "Scythians" to the north, Saracen Moors to the west and south, and further back to pre-historical Eurasia. Furthermore, YP/I

continues to impact contemporary geo-politics today. Indeed, YP especially is foundational to the formulation of dystopic futures in traditions of Anglo-American sci-fi.

The current era of globalization during this much-touted "Pacific Century" is acutely vulnerable to new rounds of anti-Asian paranoia and political manipulation. Steven Soderbergh's "Contagion" (2011) featured a Chinese bat pooping on a Chinese pig prepped by a gourmet Chinese chef in Hong Kong touching sweet Gwyneth Paltrow who carries the disease to the American heartland and dies. President Hu Jintao's 2011 visit to the White House and all the cable/news/blog coverage are about the unfair advantage "the Chinese" have over the U.S.! SARS, lead in toys fears, computer hackers, charges of Chinese "pirating" U.S. CDs, DVDs, and other cultural properties, the racial profiling of "Arab-looking" peoples, and Asians "taking over" U.S. higher education all illustrate the contemporary forms Asian "peril" in U.S. cultural political practices. And how can we unpack the bromance vehicle "The Interview" (2014), the hacking of SONY, its pulling from theaters, and North Korea? The killings at Charlie Hebdo?

The stakes of understanding "yellow peril" (and related) fears are huge for the future of our nation and globe. We need to cultivate more rigorous understanding across cultural differences, and discover our shared humanity. Fundamental epistemological questions of knowledge are at stake. How do we know what we know? And how are we, systematically, made unaware? How do yellow peril fears distract us from the real dialogues and real issues that must take place? Will sustainable energy development, for example, be sidetracked by U.S.-China discord?

In our digitizing U.S. republic the intense informational surround is like Manhattan midtown street noise. It's coming at you from all directions, loud, reverberating, and hard to pick out clear coherent vibes. Despite the explosive developments in so many cities and nations of Asia, the U.S. people are still fundamentally unaware of Asian (and Muslim) countries, where they are, and the languages they speak, the religions they practice and types of governments they have. We are largely Euro-centric in U.S. culture, and certainly even here at NYU. And we are quite unaware of the U.S. history towards Asians and Pacific Islanders, Asia and the Pacific, and the Arab and Muslim worlds. And we know few of the myriad Asian & Arab languages and dialects. We assume everyone will learn English and "the American way."

We'll be making a distinction between the big YP/I! as a macro level phenomenon, like the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Law or anti-"Jap" propaganda during WWII. These are too large an "artifact" to take on for the purposes of this seminar. But also such big events tend to gloss over the zillions of small yp/i! micro events, everyday at different points in time. Our focus is on those fragments from everyday life. We'll sort through them to help evaluate how little worries, become anxieties (or not), and can agglomerate and be manipulated.

In this context of present-past and present-future, seminar students will learn historical research skills and collaboratively document historical and contemporary case studies. We'll explore what can and must be done to counter these fallacies and practices. This is your chance to learn and conduct original research and analysis.

A dialogue-driven & chronotopic approach

I believe a liberating, dialogic pedagogy needs to engage active learners in identifying from where we each come from, imagine ourselves going, and how we consciously and unconsciously position ourselves in society and globally. These basic issues of identification are at once personal and political, social and cross-cultural, domestic and transnational. Communicating across our differences, honest analysis, rethinking, and the process of re-searching buried archives and fragments are some of the tools we'll be using to deconstruct and reconstruct, decode and recode a more critical knowledge.

Method and form have to be flexible to effectively probe the phenomenon and origins of 'yellow peril,' Islamophobia, and all their variants. Our re-search and re-membling will be collaborative, dialogue-driven, personal and political, reflexive and ongoing. I won't provide "answers" for you to regurgitate. We'll all be formulating provisional questions and provisional answers with the goal of improving our approximations of understanding what this phenomenon has and is about. The honest feedback we provide each other is key to make this active learning process work.

Chrono-topo: Chronos or time and topos or place. Time, contrary to Greenwich Mean Time mechanics, is a cultural historical construct that can be infinitely meaningful and manipulated. GMT is a global standard because it stems from British colonialism and global economic-cultural imperialism. Today more than ever, the sun rises and sets according to the mechanical and now atomic time of the British Empire's past glory. In a land which First Nations/native peoples first named, what names do we use? In what language? All stories and explorations are grounded in the moment of the here and now with an emphasis of some other time and other place "back," "now," or to come. What is the "Present"? "Past"? "Future"? We'll be exploring 'yellow peril' in these three temporal frames but always being mindful of their relations to the originating time of reference—the momentous "now" of the formulator. What is our "now"?

What about topos? Home, a place of customary practices and beliefs, what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls our "habitus" is part of the cultural cartography of here/there, insider/outsider, us/them, citizen/alien, etc. A chronotope, therefore, is the cultural-bound meaning we tie to a specific case study between the here/now we take for granted and some other time/place. For example, the "Chinese Professor" political ads shown during presidential and midterm elections by a Koch Brothers funded interest group shows a futurist Chinese high tech lecture hall with the professor lecturing in *putonghua* about the fall of American civilization to would be US voters in the here and now. Like the film "Blade Runner" it is a chronotope playing with always latent dystopic feelings, keeping anti-Chinese / anti-Asian / anti-Semitic-Islamic sentiments alive in triangulated relationships. Chronotopes can be with a past moment read from the present back, or a projection into "the future" as in much science fiction.

The fragments and artifacts of 'yellow peril'/Islamophobia past will be examined as chronotopic case studies. For the seminar, you'll be situating them in time/place from our vantage of the here/now to better understand their earlier moments of creation.

How can we challenge small yp/i! and large YP/I!? This can be daunting yet necessary. In the course of our 15 weeks, we'll learn how to describe, analyze, critique, and intervene. The class will be organized conceptually in the following way:

- Examples of YP/I? Description (3 weeks)
- Decoding historical YP/I Analysis & Critique (3)
 - Ancient genealogies (1)
 - Decoding futurology (2)
- Strategies for recoding. Interventions (4)

The last three weeks of class will be reserved for group panel presentations. The last part of the last session will be a chance to decompress, evaluate the seminar. We will not meet finals week. May 12th is when you'll turn you projects in and your final critical self evaluations.

YP/I! The Project

By taking this seminar you have unbeknownst to you become part of an international conspiracy to decolonize the world! If you agree, selections of your work will become part of a YP/I! Project website available to others who create their own YP/I! archive projects in the Americas and around the world. That's why what you write, how you write it, and the clarity of your thought will be important. It should and could be out there intervening in some way.

Three engaged reviews

To ease into become active critics and analysts of the YP phenomenon, I'll want you to write three short, journalistic-type reviews of "small" yp/i items. The first will be of the film featuring Boris Karloff in "The Mask of Fu Manchu" (1932) and the novel that started it all *The Insidious Fu Manchu* (1911). Pick little tidbit of the book and film, perhaps a line or a still, to squeeze every bit of meaning you can from it. You'll need to post your review on our NING YP/I site and comment on five other seminar-mates.

The other two can be from any time of films, drawings, paintings, songs, short stories, advertisements, comics, pulps, historical document, or whatever. The fun is going out there and seeing what you can find! These will be integrated into your major artifact project assignment and should help with that research.

Also by posting and commenting what y'all find, these reviews and the items become an archive and a shared pool of yp/i references you can use in your artifact projects.

Your artifact project

To learn about primary research, it's best to be required to produce a tangible product as a marker of what you've discovered. Typically this is in the form of a research paper, but depending on your passions and skills this could be any kind of original work—a performance, a series of poems, an activist project, an exhibition... whatever. The key is your becoming an agent in countering the ongoing power of YP/Islamophobia fears. Whatever the agreed upon final form, the paper or project will need to embody careful and thoughtful research, drafts, comments, and a final version by the exam session.

Contrary to the mythos of our hyper-individualistic culture, learning and creativity and the formulation of insights are a profoundly social and collaborative process. Throughout the term I'll have you in working groups to think through together, challenge each other, and to collaborate on your individual work. Additionally, you'll be responding to each other's posts on NING and working as a panel to present part of your work thematically the last four classes of the semester.

To build up to the project, you'll need to quickly identify some 'yellow peril' artifact (or family of artifacts) that you are fascinated and fixated by. The short reviews are part of that pooling and discovering process. Along with those short reviews, I'll assign a series of decoding exercises. Your working group will squeeze every bit of insight and historical context you can out of that chronotope.

The artifact can be visual, audio, performative, a smell, a sensation, a ... - whatever form it has appeared in. This will be your opportunity to deeply and fully understand a cultural expression of this phenomenon. The goal? For you to become THE expert on this item. And you will not only document it, but propose how to de-fang its sting, its power in the political culture. This can be a conventional essay or it can be a creative fictional or non-fictional piece. But the artifact must be at its core. If it's a creative, non-essay form, then a shorter essay will be required (approx 5 pages) to discuss the research and decisions you made for the creative piece.

Research resource help.

*Great news!!! Slam poet and Brown University grad **Paul Tran** will be helping you formulate your artifact projects. Plus - American history specialist librarian **Andrew Lee** will be helping your individual research project. He'll be helping each of you find sources and research your artifact project. He'll be on NING commenting and you'll need to meet with him at Bobst. This will be a great way for you to extend and refine your research-learning process.*

Communications, Writing, Crossing cultures...

With our interventions contesting the small yp/i! and large YP/I!, we need to learn how to communicate more precisely and clearly. And as the world become more multi-mediated and digitized and globalized, we need to do so in a decolonized, multi-lingual, cross-cultural way. **Laura Weinert-Kendt** will be work with us this term as part of the Writing-in-the-Disciplines Program (though we're really writing in the inter- and trans-disciplines, but also for a larger public), Expository Writing program. Laura will be commenting and available especially as we redraft your reviews and artifact projects for your interventions and for the YP/I! Project online.

YP! The book.

The readings this semester will primarily be from the *Yellow Peril! An archive of anti-Asian fears* (Verso). It is co-edited with a former undergrad, the archivist and historian (and a PhD candidate in the History Department at NYU) Dylan Yeats. The great discussions we've had with prior students of this seminar have also informed what we did.

Expectations

I don't believe in grades but am required to give them. I believe in effort, engagement, cultivating insights, collaboration, and sustained work. I also believe in regular self-evaluation and giving feedback. And getting feedback from "others" is also essential. So, attendance is important. So is working in groups. And

honest engagement with each other, yourself, Laura-Paul-Andrew, and yours truly are imperative. We are all en-culturated within various powerful culturally normative systems and our senses are habituated to find comfort and meaning within them. Yet, meaning cannot just be found in the “head” but must integrate “heart” and “soul,” smell, taste, touching with the Western “higher” senses of sight and sound, right and left, upper and lower, and in how we live our lives and practice our theories. This, to me, is what critical cross-cultural researchers are made of.

There will be weekly assignments to be posted on NING. This will include rounds on your project proposal, drafts of the projects, and the final project.

Your grade will be based on your critical, honest self-assessment and if we agree. A realistic self-awareness of your strengths and areas for improvement is key in this process. **I’ll be asking you to write self-evaluations for the mid-term grade and at the end of the term.** Attendance and participation, in class and online, are key. The effort you put in and how gained insights shift and deepen your understanding will be what you’ll be asked to measure yourself against.

Practical stuff

Out of the Classroom. The A/P/A Institute organizes great events, conferences, film showings all term. As does the Kervokian Center and other NYU units. Also we are in NYC and you must take advantage of what is out there! **All will be required to attend two events here or out there. Write up a short one-paragraph review of the event on NING.** Extra events will count as extra credit. All A/P/A Institute events are free.

NING. We’ll be using this social networking site and not NYU Classes. You’ll be getting an invite to sign on. It is very user friendly. All postings and comments will be on this site.

Readings.

Yellow Peril: Collecting Xenophobia – A Visual Essay (A/P/A Institute, 2006) (\$15)

‘A is for Arab’: Stereotypes in U.S. Popular Culture (A/P/A Institute, 2011) (\$15)

Tchen & Yeats, *Yellow Peril! An archive of anti-Asian fear* (Verso) (\$29.95)

To save you and your families some hard earned \$, I have copies of YP! I’ll sell at cost (\$22) and will also sell both *Collecting Xenophobia* and *‘A is for Arab’* at cost for \$15. *For this limited time offer you’ll get all three for \$37, what a deal! Bring the cash or check the second week of classes.*

There will also be PDFs posted on NING. All will be given out as weekly assignments.

Field Notebook. Notetaking is the most important work for you to learn, master, and obsessive partake in this semester. Please keep all your notes and fieldnotes in one bound volume. Ideally a bound, hardcover 100 page notebook. If you have notes from somewhere else or a scribble on a piece of paper, just tape it into the notebook. When you read, write your notes into this. This will be the primary, low tech research notebook.

Important! You will be required to meet with your groups outside of class time. Plan on 60-90 minutes per week. Easiest time is likely right after our seminar so pls keep that time free! Groups will start meeting the second week of classes. More details to come.