

**COMPARATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES/HISTORY 246
AMERICAN ORIENTALISM**

**Oberlin College
Fall 2007**

Tu Th 3:00-4:15
Science Center A254
3 SS CD

Professor Shelley Lee
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DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Since the revolutionary era, long before the arrival of large numbers of Asian immigrants in the United States, images of “Orientals” have influenced discussions about American identity and character. In this course, we will study the significance of historical representations of Asians and Asian Americans in the national consciousness, beginning with the origins of Orientalism in western thought and ending with contemporary “Yellow Peril” discourse. We will explore the social, political, and cultural contexts in which images of Asians in America emerged and how they have changed (or not changed) over time. These explorations aim to clarify how representations of Asian people have functioned to shore up and protect racially circumscribed notions of “Americanness” with respect to citizenship, morality, work, gender, and sexuality, among other areas. The course also aims to hone students’ skills in reading and thinking critically, working with a variety of primary and secondary materials, writing with clarity and purpose, and discussing and debating in a respectful and rigorous manner.

The course is organized topically and chronologically. Topics include the construction of the Chinese “coolie,” the vilification of orientalized urban space in turn-of-the-century America, studies of Asian assimilation in the U.S. by early twentieth century sociologists, and the production of the “gook” image through U.S. military encounters with Asia. In addition to secondary works, the course utilizes an array of primary materials, including political pamphlets, social science research, films, poems, and newspaper articles. The objective here is to introduce students to a range of materials used in cultural and intellectual history and to reveal myriad locations in which race and racial boundaries are developed and articulated.

REQUIREMENTS

Books at Oberlin Bookstore

Robert Lee, *Orientalism: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Temple University Press, 1999)

Mary Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn of the Century New York City* (Princeton University Press, 2004)

Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Exoticism, and Contact in Modern America* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (University of California Press, 2005, 2nd ed)

Other required readings are available online through Blackboard, and additional materials will be distributed in class.

With the exception of Week 1 and unless otherwise announced in class, all weekly reading assignments should be completed by our Tuesday meetings.

Final Grade Breakdown

Attendance and in-class participation. Attendance is mandatory and your active participation class discussion will be integral in this course. If you miss class, you must complete a makeup assignment to be arranged with me. Excessive absences and tardiness will negatively affect your grade. (10%)

Online discussion. At the beginning of each week, I will post discussion questions on Blackboard. You are required to respond online at least 5 times over the semester. You may respond to my question as well as classmates' comments. Your postings are due by Wednesday midnight. (10%)

Primary source analysis. 600 word analysis of one primary document. Further details on this assignment will be given in class. Due **October 4.** (10%)

Midterm. In-class exam covering material and lectures from Weeks 1-7. **October 18** (20%)

Primary source analysis. 1500 word essay (about 6 pages). You will gather a set of primary materials that constitute examples of Orientalist representation in American cultural and intellectual discourse. We will have a library session to learn how to look for material. Final draft due **December 13** in class. (25%)

Final exam. Cumulative but with emphasis on second half of the term. **December 20 7:00-9:00 PM** (25%)

Grades for the coursework will be based on displayed intellectual content, originality of thought, mastery of course materials, and quality of expression. Generally, I do not grant extensions or give makeup exams, and late assignments will be graded down 1/3 of a grade for each day late. I may make an exception if you speak with me well before a due date.

OBERLIN HONOR CODE

By enrolling in this class you are agreeing to abide by Oberlin's Honor Code and Honor System. Be sure you have read and understood your rights and responsibilities. You should

make sure you are familiar with the Honor Code and Honor system. You can find it at this link: <http://www.oberlin.edu/students/links-life/rules-regs07-08/honorcode.pdf>.

SPECIAL NEEDS

I will make every effort to accommodate the needs of students with physical or learning disabilities. Do see me as soon as possible to discuss what steps need to be taken and any modifications that might be necessary.

OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACTING ME

The best way to contact me about discussing course matters is to come to office hours. I strongly encourage each of you to visit at least once during the term, if only to introduce yourself. You may contact me via email, and I will do my best to reply in a timely manner, though I usually do not check email after 10:00PM.

SCHEDULE

- WEEK 1 THEORIES OF ORIENTALISM**
Sept. 4 Course overview, goals and objectives
Sept. 6 Orientalism in western thought and American Orientalism

Readings:

Edward Said, "The Scope of Orientalism" (Blackboard)
Thinking Orientals, Introduction and Chapters 9-10

- WEEK 2 EXPANSION, IMPERIALISM AND ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER**
Sept. 11 American imperialism and constructions of the Oriental
Sept. 13 Heathens in America

Readings:

Orientalism, Chapter 1
Bret Harte, "Plain Language from Truthful James" (Blackboard)
Matthew Jacobson, "Children of Barbarism" (Blackboard)
Rudyard Kipling, "The White Man's Burden" (Blackboard)
Robert Rydell, "The Louisiana Purchase Exposition, Saint Louis 1904: 'The Coronation of Civilization'" (Blackboard)

- WEEK 3 COOLIES, CHEAP LABOR AND THE AMERICAN WORKING CLASS**
Sept. 18 The "coolie" in the national imagination during Reconstruction
Sept. 20 The menace of Asian labor and working class solidarity

Readings:

Orientalism, Chapter 2
Moon Ho Jung, "Outlawing Coolies" (Blackboard)
Samuel Gompers, "Meat vs. Rice" (Blackboard)

- WEEK 4 SEX AND THE CITY: DANGEROUS ENCOUNTERS IN URBAN SPACES**
Sept. 25 The lure and danger of Oriental spaces and bodies
Sept. 27 *The Cheat* and Asian sexuality

Readings:

Orientalism, Chapter 3
The Chinatown Trunk Mystery, Chapters 1-3
"Confessions of a Taxi Dancer" (Blackboard)

WEEK 5 PERILS TO THE NATION
Oct. 2 The Yellow Peril as a domestic threat
Oct. 4 The Yellow Peril as international threat
Primary Source Analysis Due

Readings:
Orientalism, Chapter 4
The Chinatown Trunk Mystery, 4-6

WEEK 6 FASCINATING SUBJECTS: AMERICAN SOCIOLOGISTS STUDY ORIENTALS
Oct. 9 The Chicago School and its contributions
Oct. 11 Asian Orientalists?

Readings:
Thinking Orientalism, Chapters 2-7

WEEK 7 COLD WAR POLITICS AND THE NEW DOMESTICITY
Oct. 16 The feminization of Asia and origins of the model minority
Oct. 18 ***MIDTERM EXAM***

Readings:
Orientalism, Chapter 5
Christina Klein, "How to Be an American Abroad: James Michener's *The Voice of Asia* and Postwar Mass Tourism" (Blackboard)
"Chinatown Offers Us a Lesson" (Blackboard)

WEEK 8 ***FALL RECESS*******

WEEK 9 DRAGON LADIES AND LOTUS BLOSSOMS
Oct. 30 Asian women in Hollywood films
Nov. 1 LIBRARY SESSION

Readings:
Gina Marchetti, "White Knights in Hong Kong" (Blackboard)
Karen Leong, "Anna May Wong" (Blackboard)

WEEK 10 GOOKS: THE UBIQUITOUS ENEMY
Nov. 6 Wartime encounters and inventing gooks abroad
Nov. 8 The enemy within

Readings:

John Dower, "Primitives, Children and Madmen" (Blackboard)
"Suicide Pilots Dove Straight into Ships" (Blackboard)
"Gooks, Dinks, Any Questions?" (Blackboard)
Orientalism, Chapter 6

WEEK 11 RELIGION AND ORIENTALISM

Nov. 13 Christian missionaries
Nov. 15 Buddhism and Orientalism
Guest speaker: Professor James Dobbins, Department of Religion

Readings:

Peggy Pascoe, "Institutional Origins" and "Some Women's Culture and Other Women's Need" (Blackboard)
Thinking Orientalism, Chapter 1
Reading packet from book *Asian Religions in America* to be distributed in class

WEEK 12 ASIAN IMMIGRATION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

Nov. 20 TBA
Nov. 22 ***THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY--NO CLASS***

Readings:

TBA

WEEK 13 POST-INDUSTRIAL AMERICA AND THE NEW YELLOW PERIL

Nov. 27 *Rising Sun* and renewal of hostility
Nov. 29 Trade wars, finance scandals and new narratives of danger

Readings:

Orientalism, Chapter 7
Kent Ono, "America's" Apple Pie: Baseball, Japan-Bashing, and the Sexual Threat of Economic Miscegenation" (Blackboard)
"They Try Harder" (Blackboard)
"Voice of the People" (Blackboard)
"The Asian Connection" (Blackboard)

WEEK 14 ORIENTALISM FULL CIRCLE

Dec. 4 American Orientalism and the Middle East
Dec. 6 Arabs in the late twentieth century

Readings:

Epic Encounters, Chapters 1-3

**WEEK 15 TOWARD THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AND BEYOND:
TERRORISTS, MAD MEN AND ORIENTALISM TODAY**

Dec. 11 The terrorist as an Orientalist project
Dec. 13 Looking for commonalities
FINAL PAPER DUE

Readings:

Epic Encounters, Chapters 5-6
“The Seer Among the Blind” (Blackboard)
“The Depths of Evil” (Blackboard)

Final Exam: Thursday, December 20 7:00-9:00 PM

For complete academic calendar for Fall 2007 (with dates about add/drop and other deadlines, see <http://www.oberlin.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/events/calendar.pl?s=1&display=college&which=dates>

**The contents of this syllabus are subject to change. I will notify you in class and via discussion group of any updates.