

CES 313 / ENGL 311
Introduction to Asian Pacific American Literature:
Fall 2012
T/Th 12:00 – 1:15
CUE 418

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office hours:
T 1:30 – 2:30
W 1:00 – 3:00
and by appointment

NOTE: Your enrollment in this course after the first week means that you have read and understood the syllabus and that you agree to abide by its policies and procedures.

Required texts

Carlos Bulosan. *America Is in the Heart*. 1946. University of Washington, 1973.
Kauai Hart Hemmings. *The Descendants*. 2007. Random House, 2011.
Jhumpa Lahiri. *Interpreter of Maladies*. Mariner, 1999.
Julie Otsuka. *The Buddha in the Attic*. 2011. Anchor, 2012.
Craig Santos Perez. *from unincorporated territory [saina]*. Omnidawn, 2010.
Bao Phi. *Song I Sing*. Coffee House, 2011.
Haunani-Kay Trask. *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum*. University of Hawai'i, 2002.
Karen Tei Yamashita. *Tropic of Orange*. Coffee House Press, 1997.
Gene Luen Yang. *American Born Chinese*. First Second, 2006.

We will also read and view various handouts and films. You are responsible for keeping up with these as they are assigned. *Since this is a literature course, you will be expected to have the books. If you cannot afford them, let me know. I will try to have at least one copy of each text placed on reserve at the library. But you must keep up with reading assignments, or else your grade will suffer.*

Course description

This course provides a general survey of contemporary fiction and poetry by Asian American and Pacific Islander American writers. One of our texts is a graphic novel, another a collection of poems composed for performance in poetry slams. We will read no drama, literary nonfiction, or memoir, though you may, for your final paper, write about a text in one of these genres.

Course objective and “learning outcomes”

Our purpose is to read, study, discuss, and write about U.S. literature by writers of Asian or Pacific descent. Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death”—which is surely different from any definition we were taught by our schools and the media. We have been conditioned to define racism as a product of personal hatred, but Gilmore says that it comes from institutions, and it is exploitative (ie, it makes a profit for the institutions), and that it renders victims vulnerable to premature death. Keep this definition in mind as we read Bulosan, Trask, Yamashita, and our other writers.

Conservative skeptics wonder why we need to study “multicultural” texts, suggesting that the only criterion for selecting books should be literary excellence. Liberals argue that, by reading the variety of perspectives afforded by writers of color, we realize that the very idea of “standards of excellence” is not universal but is peculiar to a dominant culture. Both positions are flawed. The conservative notion is flawed by the very fact that it is advanced by white people who just happen to think that the very best books and ideas come from white people—they have an investment in proving themselves superior. The liberal notion is flawed in two ways: First, it threatens to replace one standard with another; and second, it

risks abolishing all standards and implying that, even at the same time, all differences are important even as all differences are equal.

Ishmael Reed famously wrote that “writin’ is fightin’”—that every literary act is a political act. As the struggle for gender-neutral language should have proven, language is never neutral. Even the simplest language of race is troubled. In his history of the color black, Michel Pastoreau discovers that the word “black” as the absence of all “natural” colors was once synonymous with “white.” Why do we assign the language of color to humans who are not really yellow, black, red, white, or brown? Even terms that avoid such color-based nomenclature, that derive from culture or from geographical regions, are problematic. For example, why did the U.S. Census form for 2010 restore the word “Negro” to racial categories? Why are Pacific Islanders grouped with Asian Americans in some systems and with Native Americans in others? And what does “Hispanic” really mean? Language is inadequate to name all aspects of social relations, and so we must be sensitive in our usage. It is also always changing, always trying to catch up. Writers of short stories, poems, novels, and plays must be especially sensitive to the politics of language. For all its inadequacies, language remains our best tool for framing our experiences, our memories, our feelings and ideas. Consider the ancient Chinese claim that a picture says ten thousand words: Does it say the same ten thousand words to everyone? Of course not. At its clearest, language remains our best tool for communication.

Literature is a record of the evolution of social relations. The best literature succeeds not only because it is most beautiful but also because it most faithfully and honestly tells the stories of those changing social relations.

By term’s end, you should have developed a better appreciation of the social as well as aesthetic role of literature.

Course requirements

Attendance: If you are absent from class you are responsible for obtaining all missed materials and making up all of the assigned work. If you know in advance that you are going to be absent, you are required to submit *in advance* any work that is due during your absence. You are expected to attend class every day, arrive on time, leave only when class is over, and participate in an informed way. Anything less is unacceptable and will result in penalties. After two unexcused absences (for absences resulting from university-sanctioned activities, please see me), each missed class will lead to a half-letter-grade deduction from your course grade. You will be allowed to accumulate seven absences: The first two are “free,” without consequence, after which each of the next five costs you a half-letter grade. **Your eighth absence results in an automatic F for the course.** If this seems harsh, note that, as a community of learners, we cannot learn from you if you are not here. If you repeatedly sleep, text, read the newspaper, or chat with friends during class I will mark you absent. Respect your community.

I will distribute an attendance sheet in each class meeting after the third meeting. And then the attendance policy takes effect. As this is a literature class, and as we will be discussing these books individually, attendance is especially important. Doctors’ appointments, study sessions or tests for other classes, and job interviews are *not* excusable absences. Do not come to me late in the semester with explanations for earlier absences. It is your responsibility to let me know as soon as possible about excusable absences. If you wait till weeks later, those absences will not be excused. This policy is absolute, and it is not negotiable.

Participation: Class discussions will depend on your reading the assigned texts and coming to class ready to talk about them. Participation takes many forms: for example, discussing issues raised in class or in our texts and keeping up with issues that are relevant to our texts. Some form of participation is required. If you do not participate, you will not receive a high grade.

Presentation: You will lead the class in either 1) discussion of an assigned reading or 2) discussion of your final paper. Text presentations involve your reading the text, discussing an aspect of it that you find significant (a theme, an issue, a historical figure, etc), and raising a question suggested by the text. Paper

presentations involve your explaining your paper's argument and evidence as well as your process of writing and using sources.

Reading Journal: You will submit nine Reading Journals, one for each book we read. Each journal will be at least one typed page, that is, roughly 275 to 300 words. Each journal entry is a personal response, but it should say more than "I liked the first chapter in Bulosan because it made me think." Give a detail or example: Exactly *what* did Bulosan write that made you think, and *why* do you think about it as you do? The key is to focus on the why. In 300 words, you can provide enough detail to explain yourself. Your responses will be graded, and so be careful with grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Your grade will be based not on your opinions but on your ideas and observations. Each journal will count toward five percent of your course grade, and all nine journals will count for forty-five percent. **I will accept no late journals.** Journals are due on the last day we spend on a book. For example, the first journal, on Bulosan, is due September 6, our last day on his book.

Paper: You will write one paper. You may look at an outside work of literature by an Asian American or Pacific American writer. Select from a list of writers I will provide early in the semester, or you may go off list. Or you may compare two works we will read, or two works by writers we will read. Your paper should fill three or four pages (800 – 1200 words) and discuss an issue raised by the text. You will be required to consult at least one outside source, a work of literary criticism, and cite both the literary text and the critical study. You must write in MLA or Chicago style. Your grade on the paper will be based on your writing and persuasiveness. It will count as forty percent of your course grade.

Midterm and exam: There will be no exams of any sort in this class. However, I may ask you, at the beginning of an occasional class meeting, to respond to a quick and easy question on the reading assigned for that day. These questions will count toward your participation grade.

Format for written assignments: In-class writing should be done legibly in ink. Out-of-class graded assignments should have a title and be prepared in twelve-point standard font, preferably Times New Roman, double-spaced with standard margins. If you do not know the standards for formatting formal manuscripts, then consult me or the appropriate style manual. Cite in the MLA or Chicago reference style. Papers that do not comply with the standards will suffer reduced grades. You must also remain consistent with your chosen style.

Grades (400-point scale)

Attendance and participation	10 percent	40 points
Presentation	5 percent	20 points
Journals	45 percent	180 points
Paper	40 percent	160 points

Course policies and community standards

Ideally, each class meeting will be a lively, student-directed discussion of our course material. Short of that ideal, I will try to lecture as little as possible. I hope we will model a "good" community, driven by shared concerns even when we disagree. To do well in this class, please note the following guidelines:

Read the assigned material when it is due. *Bring the assigned reading to class.*

Come to class on time, and leave only when class is over. Late arrivals and early departures count as absences.

Do not read newspapers or magazines in class, and turn off cell phones and all other electronic devices, unless you can show that you are using them for note-taking.

Do not use class time for sleeping or otherwise disengaging, or you will count as absent.

Name-calling and other signs of disrespect will result in your removal from the class.

Feel free to disagree, respectfully.

Consider others' views. Reflect on your own social location, your privileges and power.

Learn a historically informed definition of racism, and challenge all racist discourse.

Reflect your grasp of history and social relations by respecting shy and quiet classmates, and by deferring to the experiences of people of color.

Finally, understand and consider the rage of people who are victims of systematic injustice.

James Baldwin wrote that people of color have an obligation to feel rage over this nation's history of racism. If injustice does not fill you with rage, then perhaps you should ask yourself why.

Note on language: In our books we may read some words or phrases that will be, to some sensibilities, coarse or vulgar or racist. By themselves, no "mere" words are offensive. What makes a word vulgar or racist is its usage by a particular speaker in a particular context. Insensitive whites such as Glenn Beck complain that, for example, they are not allowed to say the "n" word without being labeled racist but that black men use it among themselves all the time. To "earn" the right to that word, Beck must first endure 500 years of racism. When you see such words in our books, consider their context. Who speaks them? Why? And to whom?

Academic integrity: Plagiarism or cheating of any kind will result in your failing the course. (See the WSU Student Handbook on Academic Dishonesty.) Academic honesty is easier to achieve than academic dishonesty, if only you observe this rule: Whenever you use someone else's information or ideas, cite the source.

If you write a five-sentence paragraph and use a source for all five sentences, then you must cite that source in every sentence. If you cite your source only at the end of the paragraph, then you have plagiarized the first four sentences (unless you use a style that permits this), and your grade will be affected. This is not negotiable, and you are expected to know the rules.

Students with Disabilities: Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please either visit or call the Access Center (Washington Building 217; 509-335-3417) to schedule an appointment with an Access Advisor. All accommodations **MUST** be approved through the Access Center.

Emergency Notification System: WSU has made an **emergency notification system** available for faculty, students, and staff. Please register at myWSU with emergency contact information (cell, email, text, etc). You may have been prompted to complete emergency contact information when registering for classes on ROnet. Please refer to the University emergency management website <http://oem.wsu.edu/emergencies> as well as WSU ALERT <http://alert.wsu.edu> for information on WSU's communication resources WSU will use to provide warning and notification for emergencies. The entire WSU safety plan can be found at <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu>.

Schedule

Note that all assignments are negotiable and subject to change. You are responsible for having the texts and for keeping up with all changes. Books are identified below by their authors: ie, Yoon or Lahiri. Also note that several of our authors (eg, Trask and Perez) provide helpful glossaries or footnotes/endnotes. Look for these and read them. And look for epigraphs and dedications at the beginnings of books.

8/21: Introduction, syllabus.

8/23: Phi 1-39.

8/28: Bulosan vii-xxiv, 1-93. Begin text presentations.

8/30: Bulosan 94-189.

9/4: Bulosan 190-261.

9/6: Bulosan 262-327. FIRST JOURNAL DUE (BULOSAN).

9/11: Hemmings 1-147.

9/13: Hemmings 149-224.

9/18: Hemmings 225-283, and A Reader's Guide. SECOND JOURNAL DUE (HEMMINGS).

9/20: Trask, 1-8. Phi 40-67.

9/25: Yang: Read whole book.

9/27: Perez 11-38. THIRD JOURNAL DUE (YANG).

10/2: Perez 39-84.

10/4: Perez 85-108. Trask 9-36.

10/9: Perez 109-130. Lahiri 1-42. FOURTH JOURNAL DUE (PEREZ).

10/11: Lahiri 43-82.

10/16: Lahiri 83-157.

10/18: Lahiri 158-198. FIFTH JOURNAL DUE (LAHIRI).

10/23: Phi 68-110. SIXTH JOURNAL DUE (PHI).

10/25: Trask 37-62. SEVENTH JOURNAL DUE (TRASK).

10/30: Writing about literature. Literary theory.

11/1: Streamas, "Narrative Politics in Historical Fictions for Children," from *Comparative Literature and Culture* Web site:

<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1348&context=clweb>

11/6: Otsuka 1-54.

11/8: Otsuka 55-129.

11/13: EIGHTH JOURNAL DUE (OTSUKA). Discussion of papers, writing about literature

11/15: Yamashita: Hypercontexts, epigraphs, "Gentle reader" note, and Monday section.

11/27: Yamashita, Tuesday and Wednesday sections.

11/29: Yamashita, Thursday section.

12/4: Yamashita, Friday, Saturday, Sunday sections.

12/6: NINTH JOURNAL DUE (YAMASHITA). Discussion of Asian Pacific American literature and war. Closing remarks and questions.

12/13: PAPER DUE in my office, 118 Wilson-Short, 3:00 PM. *Do not slip your paper under my door.* Keep a copy for your own records.