

Syllabus: American Studies 349, Spring, 2017, Dr. Henry Yu

Making History with Multimedia: Asian American and Asian Migration Storytelling through Film

Thursdays, 1:30pm-4:20pm with weekly Monday evening 7:30pm film screenings

The stories of Asian Americans and global Asian migrants have commonly been told through film and multimedia rather than textual representations. Underrepresented in narratives of U.S. history, activists and community-based filmmakers have often turned to film and digital media forms to document and story-tell about neglected subjects. This course examines a selection of Asian American films and at the same time asks students to create projects using multimedia tools. We will work together to learn basic filmmaking techniques through weekly workshops with the goal of being able to produce your own short film by the end of the term.

Learning Outcomes

The primary goal of the class is for students to learn how to use now widely accessible and affordable means of digital multimedia production to make effective arguments. In some sense, short form video has become as powerful as the written essay as a means of storytelling and persuasion, and this class aims at introducing students to how documentary forms have been at the heart of historical knowledge production and storytelling for Asian Americans, but more importantly for students themselves to use multimedia techniques to create and distribute stories that they have themselves researched. The historical content of the class focuses on Asian American and Asian migration history; however, the primary goal is not for students to acquire in-depth knowledge about these subjects. Although not a prerequisite, having taken previous courses in Asian American history is useful.

Students can be expected to interact with each other in seminar as well as within group exercises and workshops. They must learn to be effective and humane in giving constructive suggestions to others, and for those who choose to work within a team for their Final Term Project, they must collaboratively organize a group project where their skills complement each other and their workload is equitable. Through the paired interview and representation exercise, as well as in any project that engages with off-campus communities, students will grapple in their own practices with the ethics of representation, and through readings and group discussions will learn about the ethics and politics of community-based knowledge production.

Although this is not a film criticism class, students will be expected to analyze the films we watch each week with an appreciation of the intentions of the filmmakers and whether they were effective in achieving their goals. The overarching aim of the class is *not* to train students to be professional filmmakers, but for them to acquire enough basic filmmaking skills to be persuasive and effective storytellers and to be able to use digital media to make compelling arguments. Each of the assignments, exercises, and workshops during the semester are designed to build competency toward the production of the Final Term Project, and the expectation is that the quality of the Final Project will be sufficient for online public distribution and to make an impact that has been explicitly articulated as a project goal.

Evaluation

Paired interview and multimedia representation exercise	(10%)
Critical multimedia presentation	(10%)
Mid-term Paper (background research for Final Project)	(30%)
Storyboard/Script Outline (oral slideshow presentation)	(10%)
Final Term Project (in the form of a video or multimedia project)	(30%)
Quality of participation in class discussions and feedback to other students	(10%)

Assignment #1 – Paired interview and multimedia representation exercise – 10%

Interview each other in pairs and design a way to represent the other person to the rest of the class using some form of digital media. Maximum 5 min. length for videos and other linear multimedia forms; maximum 1000 words for any use of written text. Post your representation to the class blog. Each of you will be watching the rest of your classmates' work, evaluating their effectiveness, and giving constructive suggestions in a workshop setting and in online feedback.

Assignment #2 – Critical multimedia exercise – 10%

Each of you will bring to class what you have found to be the most compelling and effective online multimedia presentation about any subject—it can be a short video, a persuasive multimedia website, anything that you can present to the class and explain why you find it effective, and what we can learn from the way it uses digital media forms, or aesthetic design, or rhetorical tone, to make an argument.

Assignment #3 – Midterm Paper (background research for Final Project) – 30%

A written essay (roughly 2500 words) presenting the subject of your Final Project, including background research that outlines the issues and themes, and the questions that you will raise. This forms the foundation of the Final Project, and may include preliminary interviews as well as the gathering of news articles, essays, scholarly work, and existing online as well as library and archival material. The concluding section of the essay must outline why the subject is interesting and important to you and to a potential audience for your project, and the concrete steps you propose to take over the rest of the semester to gather the material to create a short film. If you have decided already to work in a team, this paper can be collaboratively produced, but the length will still be 2500 words and the expectation will be that you have worked together to produce a more effective product than what a single person could have accomplished.

Assignment #4 – Storyboard/Script Outline – 10%

Each of you will present a short 15-minute slideshow storyboard outline of your final project. If you are working in a group, the presentation can be made together but must remain less than 15-minutes.

Assignment #5 – Final Term Project – 30%

This can be done as an individual or group project. If you decide to make a film, the length should aim at a maximum of 8 minutes, and ideally in the 2-5 minute range. Although long form documentary films for telecast are generally 22 or 44 minutes, the aim is for you to publish your film for online distribution (what MIT professor Vivek Bald calls “short attention span documentary”).

Quality of Participation in Class and Feedback to Fellow Students – 10%

One of the core principles of this class is that we will help each other to learn and improve and to create the most effective final project either in groups or as individuals. The class is not graded on a “Bell Curve,” nor is one individual’s success achieved at the expense of another in a zero-sum gain. How well you help each other is essential to your individual evaluation because of the importance of group workshops and peer feedback in collaborative learning. You will be asked at the end of the course to provide informal input about the most effective and useful support given to you by your peers.

Films Screened Weekly (Mondays, 7:30pm-9:00pm)

Screenings and discussions cover key principles of documentary filmmaking: narrative, style, tone, pace, point of view, argument, character development, music/soundscape, the use of affect/emotion – in both short and long form documentaries

Ancestors in the Americas, Part 1: Coolies Sailors, Settlers (2001) Directed by Loni Ding

A Family Gathering (1988) Directed by Lise Yasui

My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha (1997) Directed by Renee Tajima-Pena

Slaying the Dragon (1988) Directed by Deborah Gee

The Slanted Screen: Asian American Men in Film and Television (2006)
Directed by Jeff Adachi

Chinese Restaurants (2005) selection of 90 minutes from 15-part series, Directed by Cheuk Kwan

AKA Don Bonus (1995) Directed by Spencer Nakasako

Who Killed Vincent Chin? (1987) Directed by Renee Tajima-Pena and Christine Choy

All Our Father's Relations (2016) Alejandro Yoshizawa and Sarah Ling

Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story (2003), Directed by Jari Osborne

Week by Week Schedule

Readings: This course explores the history of migration from Asia to the United States and the Americas from the late 19th to the early 21st century as a context for developing digital multimedia storytelling skills. There will be readings and discussions exploring some of the major issues concerning how migration from Asia was--and remains--a formative influence on the social, economic, cultural and political life of the Americas. It will introduce students to the broad context of the impact of migration from different parts of Asia on local, national and transnational communities. Through a variety of readings and engaged discussions, we will explore a range of topics including contested conceptions of Asian-ness, the relationship between migration and indigeneity in the Americas, and how perceptions of trans-Pacific migrants changed over time. Although readings will be limited to 100-150 pages per week, the expectation will be that students will be prepared to discuss the themes and issues in the readings. The goal is to develop your own interpretations, in order to produce perspectives through discussion that help shape your understanding of contemporary and historical debates about migration from Asia to the U.S. and throughout the Americas.

Workshops: The ultimate aim of the class is for you to learn how to craft compelling stories, to make persuasive arguments, and to create and distribute new knowledge using digital tools. Weekly workshops will help develop your basic filmmaking skills in the context of group exchange—learning from each other and learning by doing. Making and learning from glorious mistakes, and helping each other improve is expected and essential.

Each week, our 3-hour seminar will be organized around three main goals:

- 1) Discussion of readings and films
- 2) Develop techniques through “learning by doing” for using digital cameras, smartphones, audio recorders, presentation and editing software
- 3) Group workshops that use peer engagement to learn from others and to develop effective feedback

Week 1 – Introduction (February 9, 2017)

Arrange Pairs for Assignment #1

Go over syllabus and course

Workshop: Basic filmmaking techniques: Composition, Lighting, Sound
Introduce concepts such as “talking heads,” the “rule of thirds,” “shooting into corners,” “backlighting,” “nausea cam,” the importance of “sound over sight,” the use of music and audioscape

Week 2 – Migration Mobility and the Making of History (February 16, 2017)

Discussion Topics: Is it more normal in human history to be mobile or to remain tied to one place? How can we understand nation-building and Asian exclusion as shaping the identity of the United States?

Readings: Donna R. Gabaccia, "Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History," *Journal of American History* 86, no. 3; Erika Lee, "Enforcing the Borders; Chinese Exclusion along the Border with Canada and Mexico, 1882-1924" *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (June 2002); "The Rhythms of the Trans-Pacific," "The Sounds of the Cantonese Pacific," and "The Rising Dischord of the White Pacific," Henry Yu, in *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s*, edited by Dirk Hoerder and Donna Gabaccia (Brill, 2013)

Workshop: "Short Attention Span Docs"

"Food. Curated" with Liza Mosquito De Guia <http://foodcurated.com/>

"World War II in 7 Minutes" John Ruddy
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvDFsxjaPaE>

"History of Japan" Bill Wurtz
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mh5LY4Mz15o>

"Real Life Game of Thrones, Part 1: Is Great Britain Westoros?"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pj9fn4L4Njk>

"Blaming the Mainlander" Amanda Chiu, Tyler Mark, Allison O'Neil, Jane Shi, Minnie Tsai and Ralph Tsang https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WB2VcAKZ_jI

Screening (Monday, February 13, 7:30pm): "Ancestors in the Americas, Part 1: Coolies Sailors, Settlers" (2001) Directed by Loni Ding

Week 3 – History as Personal Practice and as an Act of Collaboration (February 23, 2017)

Discussion Topics: Oral Histories, Community History, and the Use of New Media Technology to Overcome Silence

Readings: Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different," in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998); Henry Yu, "Writing the Past in the Present" *Amerasia Journal* 28:3 (2002); Dirk

Hoerder, "How the Intimate Lives of Subaltern Men, Women and Children Confound the Nation's Narratives," *Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (2001)

Workshop: "Tips and Typical Mistakes Made by Beginners in Filmmaking"

"What Are You Anyways?" (2005) Director/Writer Jeff Chiba Stearns

Assortment of student interview films, 2005-2015

Screening (Monday, February 20, 7:30pm): "A Family Gathering," (1988) Directed by Lise Yasui, < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Sc10LnBav0 > and "My America, or Honk If You Love Buddha" (1997) Directed by Renee Tajima-Pena

Week 4 - Tiger Moms, Dragon Ladies, Rich Asian Girls, and Do Asian Men Actually Have a Hard Time Dating? Representing Sexuality, Family and Gendered Histories
March 2, 2017

Discussion Topics: How have representations of "Asians" become gendered and sexualized? Has the economic rise of China and the consumer habits of wealthy Chinese migrants created echoes of historical fears of the "yellow peril"?

Readings: Renee E. Tajima, "Lotus Blossoms Don't Bleed: Images of Asian Women." In Asian Women United of California, ed., *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1989); "The Myth of the Rice King," Michael McCullough, *Vancouver Sun*, February 14, 2004; "Why Chinese Moms are Superior," Amy Chua, *Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 8, 2011; Elaine Chau, "Ultra Rich Asian Girls: more than flaunting wealth?" *CBC News*, 17 Oct 2014.

Workshop: Affect for Effect: Using Humor and Emotions in Film

"Yellow Fever," Wong Fu Productions

"The Complicated Chinese Family Tree," Off the Great Wall:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1HaZ4WLo50>

Screening (Monday, Feb. 27, 7:30pm): *Slaying the Dragon* (1988) Directed by Deborah Gee

The Slanted Screen: Asian American Men in Film and Television (2006) Directed by Jeff Adachi

Week 5 -Class Workshop (March 9, 2017)

Assignment #1 Due on Sunday night, March 5, before midnight

Workshop: Each other's assignments

Watch all paired interview films, provide online feedback, and be prepared to discuss them in class

What can we learn from each other? What kinds of mistakes did you make and learn to avoid? What kinds of feedback and suggestions are useful? Is there a difference between "criticism" and being helpful? What kinds of contemporary issues might be of interest to you as a topic?

Screening (Monday, March 6, 7:30pm): Screening: "Chinese Restaurants" (2005) selection of 3 segments from 15-part series, Directed by Cheuk Kwan

Food, Places, and Cultural History through Objects

Discussion Topics: How crafting places as richly developed film settings can invoke multiple registers of history; Storytelling through material objects and the movement of people, goods, and ideas across space and time; Chinese restaurants as a useful example of a dispersed and yet highly emplaced site for telling stories

Readings: Imogene Lim, *Mostly Mississippi: Chinese Cuisine Made in America* in *Mostly Mississippi: Chinese Restaurants of the South*, by Indigo Som, pp.13-15
Imogene Lim, Chinese Restaurants as Cultural Lessons, *Flavor & Fortune* 4(2):13, 22. June 97;
Madeline Hsu, "From Chop Suey to Mandarin Cuisine: Fine Dining and the Refashioning of Chinese Ethnicity During the Cold War," in Sucheng Chan and Madeline Hsu, editors, *Chinese Americans and the Politics of Race and Culture* (Temple, 2015)

Using Objects (Especially Food) to Tell Stories

"Food Fight: An Eggsistential Tale"

Alyssa Sy de Jesus, Diana Quan, Felix Chiu, Felix Lo, Shirley Li, Terence Lee, Tom Barker, Wallis Tsang

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=88RW1yI5bIE>

MIDTERM EXAM Week and SPRING RECESS (March 13-26)

Do Assignment #2 and come prepared in Week 6 to present in class. Also begin thinking about and exploring possible topics for your term project!

!!! NO FILM SCREENING ON MONDAY, MARCH 27!!!

**Week 7 – Effective Techniques for Filmmaking and Web-based Multimedia
March 30, 2017**

Workshop: What Works for You?

Assignment #2 Critical multimedia presentation

Screening: AKA Don Bonus (1995) Directed by Spencer Nakasako

Week 8

Midterm Background Research Papers Due

April 6, 2017

Workshop: Making Persuasive Arguments in Short Film

“4 Reasons Why You Should Care about Vancouver's Chinatown”

Directed by: Austin Liu, Dominique Bautista, Nicole So, Rafael Fuentes, Tony Wan

Written by: Nicole So, Austin Liu and Dominique Bautista

Animations by: Rafael Fuentes

Narrated by: Dominique Bautista

Edited by: Tony Wan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMVRQo3KSOk>

Screening (Monday, April 3, 7:30pm): Who Killed Vincent Chin? (1987) Directed by Renee Tajima-Pena and Christine Choy

APRIL: BEGIN SHOOTING

Week 9 - - Workshop on Final Term Projects

April 13, 2017

Presentation and Group Feedback on Storyboard/Script Presentations

Screening (Monday, April 10, 7:30pm): All Our Father's Relations (2016)
Alejandro Yoshizawa and Sarah Ling

Discussion Topic: Ethics of Representation and Collaborative Community Knowledge Co-Creation and Sharing; Permissions and Intellectual Property

Week 10 – Composition

April 20, 2017

Workshop: Composing Scenes – Camera Angles, Zooming, Establishing Shots, Panning, Using Motion, Separation of Audio and Visuals

Screening (Monday, April 17, 7:30pm): Sleeping Tigers: The Asahi Baseball Story (2003), Directed by Jari Osborne

Week 11 – Hands-on Editing
April 27, 2017

Workshop: Logging and Organizing Your Footage; How to Use Cuts to Create Affect

Week 12 - Using Music and Sound Effectively
May 4, 2017

Workshop: Choosing Copyright-free Music to Establish Mood (for example:
<http://www.freeplaymusic.com>)

Rough Cuts to be Completed by SUNDAY, MAY 7

GROUP SCREENING OF ROUGH CUTS ON MONDAY, MAY 8

Workshop: Helping Each Other on Rough Cuts

Final Projects are due on Tuesday, May 16, 2017

Some Quick Filmmaking and Editing Resources Online

Simon Cade—10 Tips for Beginner Filmmakers
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njeCxUspmHk>
Composition and Framing Tips
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MflanZimZR8>
Visual storytelling versus dialogue
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X5xvITZpcY>

Shoot Like a Pro with an iPhone
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhGsFzAZ71Y>

Working with Final Cut Pro
http://www.kenstone.net/fcp_homepage/editing.html

Useful Online Examples of Short Interviews and History-Making
“Chinese Canadian Stories”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZmIZiTUNpw>