

Asian American and Pacific Islander Labor Issues

Asian American Studies 119; class ticket number: 121-414-200

Fridays, 2:00 – 4:50 p.m.
Public Policy 2250

Course Description

Both historically and today, community-based struggles by immigrant workers are central to defining the Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences. Labor struggles bring to the forefront issues of human rights, interethnic alliances, racism and gender oppression, the impact of globalization, and the ongoing efforts to expand democracy. However, despite their significance, Asian American Studies has virtually no classes focusing on labor organizing.

Through this service-learning class, students will develop a health and safety comic book to help the Koreatown Restaurant Workers Association and Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA) educate Latino and Korean immigrant workers. To take up this project, students are required to analyze both current and historical immigrant labor struggles, identify resources relating to worker rights on health and safety, and investigate labor conditions in the restaurant industry. Students will also study how worker campaigns are redefining community politics, such as gender relations and race relations.

This class also focuses on the key role that Asian American and Pacific Islander students can play in supporting labor struggles of low-income immigrants. This class provides students with hands-on activist training to help them confront class polarization, which increasingly is becoming a major feature of Asian American and Pacific Islander communities. Students will receive training in ways that they can use campus resources, including their academic skills, to support immigrant labor struggles.

Course Staffing

Glenn Omatsu, 52974 (messages only); office hours: before and after class sessions
e-mail: gomatsu@ucla.edu or glenn.omatsu@csun.edu

Course Readings

- 1) The Class Reader is required and is available from Course Reader Materials, 1141 Westwood Blvd., (310) 443-3303
- 2) Asian American Labor Bibliography, Part I: Historical Struggles, 1840s-1960s
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc/classweb/winter02/aas197a/apapart1.html>
Part II: Contemporary Struggles from the 1960s
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc/classweb/winter02/aas197a/apapart2.html>
- 3) KIWA Restaurant Workers Campaign
<http://www.kiwa.org/e/homefr.htm>

Grading

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| 40% | Reflection papers and in-class assignments |
| 10% | Essay assignment and comic strip, “Autobiography and History” |

- 20% Report on two political tours (one of Koreatown and one of another L.A. or Southern California community where Asian immigrants work or live — e.g., Garment District, Chinatown, Little Tokyo, Filipino Town, Little Saigon)
- 30% Class project

Description of Class Project

Students will participate in the current campaign of the Koreatown Restaurant Workers Association and Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates. 1) Students will be responsible for creating a comic book on health and safety rights for workers in Koreatown restaurants. The comic book will be in Spanish, Korean, and English. 2) Students will also organize a campus reception to present the finished comic book to community organizers and workers. 3) Students will also organize a campus event featuring the new film by Visual Communications, “Grassroots Rising,” on Asian immigrant labor struggles in Los Angeles. 4) Students will also be responsible for organizing other educational activities — such as picket lines and educational forums — emphasizing the key role that student solidarity with workers can play in transforming our communities. Students will be assigned to committees for the class project.

Class Goals

- 1) To understand the ways that labor struggles by low-income immigrants are central to defining the Asian American and Pacific Islander experiences, both historically and today;
- 2) To highlight the significance of community-based labor organizing strategies in Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, with a focus on health and safety issues of immigrant workers in the Koreatown restaurant industries;
- 3) To analyze the significance of today’s immigrant worker campaigns in relation to critical social issues, especially globalization, immigrant rights, human rights, and women’s and children’s struggles for justice;
- 4) To examine class dynamics in today’s Asian American and Pacific Islander communities;
- 5) To highlight the importance of interethnic and interracial alliances created by Asian and Pacific Islander workers in their labor struggles;
- 6) To emphasize the key role that students today armed with Asian American Studies can play in supporting struggles of low-income Asian and Pacific Islander workers;
- 7) To provide activist training for students to work with community groups, community-based labor groups, unions, and immigrant workers; this training will address the class privileges of students in elite institutions such as UCLA and the ways that they can use campus resources to support the struggles for justice by immigrant workers.

Student Responsibilities for this Class

1) Make sure this is a class you really want to take (look over the syllabus and assignments). This class takes students out of the “safe zone” of the traditional classroom. Notice, for example, that there are no tests, and grading for the final class project will be partly based on an evaluation given by a member of a community organization. This does not mean that this class will be easy. On the contrary, students who are used to traditional academic standards will experience high levels of anxiety by sixth week. Please carefully consider whether you want to take this class and accept the responsibilities listed below.

2) By enrolling in this class, each student is making a commitment to attend all class sessions, to do the assigned readings and reflection papers, and to work on the class project,

including participating in meetings outside of class for the final project. Attendance is particularly important, and students will be severely penalized for missing a class session. In addition, there will be in-class assignments each class session that cannot be made up.

3) This class requires a considerable amount of work outside the classroom (research, committee work, community visits, etc.).

4) Grading for this class is based on each student's performance; I will not grade on a curve. Some students come to this class with extensive experience in activism; I will expect more from these students than those with less experience.

5) Finally, a key goal of this class is to encourage students to share what they are learning with others and to learn from immigrant workers in our communities. In the late 1960s, the movements that created Ethnic Studies began with a vision of education that linked classroom learning to issues in the community. This vision continues today. Students have a special responsibility to share their knowledge and resources with others in their communities. Knowledge is too important to stay within the classroom. In addition, students at elite institutions such as UCLA have a special responsibility to develop the necessary humility to effectively teach and learn from those in our communities.

Class Sessions

Note: Each class session will be divided into three parts: a lecture and discussion on a topic relating to the class project, a student activist training component, and in-class meetings of student work committees for the class project. Students are also expected to meet outside of class for preparation of their part of the class project.

Friday, Jan. 13	Overview of the significance of immigrant labor struggles for defining the Asian American and Pacific Islander experience, both historically and today; discussion of class project
Friday, Jan. 20	Community-based labor organizing and the key role of Asian American and Pacific Islander students today
Friday, Jan. 27	Workshop by teacher-activist Tony Osumi: "How to create a simple comic book to educate your community"
Friday, Feb. 3	Understanding class contradictions in today's Asian American and Pacific Islander communities; leadership training workshop
Friday, Feb. 10	Strategies for grassroots community education; rooting out the legacy of western colonialism from our hearts, minds, and souls
Friday, Feb. 17	Mobilization strategies: ideas for student activists
Friday, Feb. 24	Identifying resources for class project
Friday, Mar. 3	Identifying resources for class project

- Friday, Mar. 10 Identifying resources for class project
- Friday, Mar. 17 Last class session: reception for Koreatown restaurant workers and organizers?

Required Readings (in Course Reader)

- Debbie Wei, “Students’ Stories in Action Comics”
- Diana Yi, “Our Mission, My Mission”
- Michelle Banta, “The Painting”
- Meredith Lee, “Intersection to the Path of Life: A Historically Related Autobiography”
- Jessica Kim, “My Grandmother: The Historicity of Personal Experience”
- Trinh Le, “War Is the Reason I Am Here Today”
- William Gow, “California Dreamin’: Autobiography as History”
- Cheryl Samson, “A First Generation’s Pinay Experience: Transformation and Responsibility”
- Suzan Luu, “Consequences of a War”
- Sarah Marie P. Mamaril, “Stepping Stones towards a Successful Future”
- Pa Xiong, “Hmong Means ‘Free,’ or Does It? Memoirs of the Hmong Dead”
- Linda Lam, “Why Did You Come to America”
- Julie Vo, “Intersectionality: Autobiography and History”
- Michael Li, “Being Pulled from the Matrix of Western-centric Education”
- Katie Li, “Learning from the Residents of Boston Chinatown”
- Asian American Studies M116, “The Assi Tree”
- Tram Nguyen, “Showdown in K-town,” *Colorlines* (Spring 2001)
- Lu Xun, Preface to “Call to Arms,” and excerpt from poem, “Self Mockery”
- Vy Nguyen, “Fear of an Asian Campus”
- Glenn Omatsu, “Fists of Legend and Fury: What Asian American College Students Can Learn from Jet Li and Bruce Lee”
- Glenn Omatsu, “The Two Asian Pacific Americas”
- Rena Wong, “Political Tours: L.A. Garment District and Little Saigon”
- Christine Araquel, “Pilipinotown Political Tour”
- Ryan Chen, Ching Huang, Ken Ichiroku, and Julie Yoshioka, “Chinatown Political Tour”
- Hanna Kim, “Political Tours of Chinatown and Koreatown: Differences as a Way to Unity”
- Jacqueline Pon and Ryotaro Isobe, “Political Tours of Koreatown and Little Tokyo: Learning about Community Involvement”
- Excerpts from David Werner and Bill Bower, *Helping Health Workers Learn: A Book of Methods, Aids, and Ideas for Instructors at the Village Level*
- Glenn Omatsu, “Student Leadership Training Booklet”
- Glenn Omatsu, “Student Activism Resource Handbook”

Recommended Readings:

- Glenn Omatsu, “Asian Pacific American Workers and the Expansion of Democracy,” *Amerasia Journal* 18:1 (1992)
- Wen-ti Sen, *The Garment Worker’s Story* (Boston: Asian American Resource Workshop, 1991)