

Hunter College/CUNY

Department of English / Asian American Studies Program

PASSPORT READINGS: Writing on Departures & Arrivals

A Writing and Reading Workshop with Russell C. Leong

Instructor: Russell C. Leong
Class Meeting: Tuesdays & Thursdays, from 4:10PM to 5:25PM
Office Location: TBA
Office Hours: TBA
E-mail: rleong@ucla.edu

from: Guns and Roses

*"Immigrants and faggots
They make no sense to me
They come to our country--
And think they'll do as they please
Like some mini-Iran
Or spread some fuckin' disease"*

This contemporary lyric captures some of the vocal sentiments directed toward four groups of people in the U.S today, namely: Immigrants, Gays and Lesbians, those from the Middle-East, and those stigmatized with AIDS, or other transmittable disease. Is it merely an accident that these groups are lumped together and perceived as "threats" to the "American" body? Do you agree or disagree with these sentiments in light of recent events in New York, Arizona and around the country?

This impetus for this new course--designed as a hands-on workshop and seminar--originated primarily from Amitava Kumar's book, "Passport Photos" and "Asian Americans on War and Peace"--the first published before 9/11, and the second, right after that event. Both works offer perspectives on the immigrant experience, on racialization, sexualization, food practices, and on war, violence, and peace, and utilize a variety of texts: prose, essay, and poetic approaches to articulating what it means to be living in a post 9/11 era.

Passport Readings refers to the multiple meanings of name, nationality, birth, generation, gender, etc. captured in a passport, or similar type of identity or residency card which every person usually possesses--a shortcut to identity one's legal or official status within a nation. Your passport, in essence, is a kind of "book" to be read by whoever opens it. On the other hand, historical conditions and political circumstances after 9/11 make the very meaning of one's identity more ambiguous and complex than any identity paper we might possess. Themes and readings for the workshop are generally organized around the following:

- I. February: Passports, Places, and Passages
- ii. March: Meat versus Rice: Talking Back, Writing Back

iii. May: Maiden Voyages & Pidgin Identities

iV. April: Departing Our Souls, Defending Our Immigrants

"Writing on Departures & Arrivals" casts a wide net: referring to multiple engagements and approaches around migration, settlement, locality, citizenship or non-citizenship, gender and generation through the writing we read-- together with the writing / images we create or choose ourselves.

The beginning writing workshop will introduce you to the nuts and bolts strategies to write, edit, and access your prose or poetic piece. I hope that some of what we cover will be applicable to your own writing, and enable you to find your "writing destiny." No matter what the genre--be it prose, totally fiction, memoir, or journalistic or poetic feature, many of the elements of effective writing apply to all forms.

In addition to reading and discussing YOUR creative writing exercises during class, we'll be utilizing shorter texts from the following Asian and South Asian American authors: Jessica Hagedorn, Frank Chin, Amitava Kumar, Isfi Nassim, Ed Bok Lee, Christina Yao, Dana Takagi, Duc Tha, Andrew Thi, Derrick Bell, Shahidul Alam, G. S. Chanddra, Jana Monji, Christina Yao, Bill Ong Hing, Louise Cankar and Sunaina Maira, and others. Topics include racialization and racial profiling after 9/11, stereotypes of generation and the criminalization of youth, gender and sexualities, and the multiple meanings of home and citizenship today. Weekly exercises and collaborative feedback will enable us to build upon what we read and write during the semester.

GOAL: As a writer, each of you has a writing destiny, to write the story that she or he must tell. In other words, your story is not merely an assignment or for a grade.

REQUIRED BOOKS: Asian Americans on War and Peace edited by Don Nakanishi and Russell Leong and, selected issues of Amerasia Journal (for purchase).

IN ADDITION: Electronic or paper handouts from the following books:

On a Bed of Rice: An Asian American Erotic Feast, edited by Geraldine Kudaka; Asian American Sexualities, edited by Russell C. Leong; and journalistic selections from the New York Times; Amitava Kumar's Passport Photos.

REQUIREMENTS:

- a. Attendance at all meetings and workshops. More than one unexcused absence will result in one lower grade.
- b. Minimum: One office meeting with instructor to discuss the development of your story.
- c. Each Thursday, we will read excerpts from your weekly writings or have discussion sessions.

Grade:

- a. Will be based upon one final revised short story, poetry collection, creative non-fiction, or memoir. Can use "c" as a basis for your research.
- b. Written critiques of class materials.

- c. Class exercises, the main one being one short interview, photographic essay, video, or combination thereof, with a contextual essay. Subject matter can address post 9/11 writing; gender and sexuality; place and passages, migration and criminalization, food and ethnic meaning.
- d. Participation in the Public Reading.
- e. Final.

Note: Guest speakers, changes of film, depending on availability during the course are subject to change.

FEBRUARY: PASSPORTS, PLACES AND PASSAGES

1

THEY MAKE NO SENSE TO ME (Guns and Roses Lyric)
CLASS INTRODUCTIONS: Name, Face, I.D., Gender, and Age

3

READING: A PASSPORT IS AN OPEN BOOK
(PASSPORT OR FACSIMILE REQUIRED)

8

READING: OH SAY CAN YOU SEE
(WRITINGS FROM AA ON WAR AND PEACE)
How Does It Feel to Be a Problem, Moustafa Bayoumi
Why Children do not Knock on my Door, Ifti Nasim

10

CLASS WORKSHOP DISCUSSION

15

READING: WAR AND PEACE CONTINUED
Story by Marlon Layugan, Mari Matsuda

17

CLASS WORKSHOP

22

READING: NYT PORTRAITS
Muslim Research Issues by Irum Shiekh
Debate over Islamic Cultural Center

24

CLASS WORKSHOP: Choosing Your Genre

MARCH: MEAT VERSUS RICE: TALKING BACK; FINDING VOICE

1

READING: **Anti-South Asian and Muslim Violence, Louise Cainkar and Sunaina Maira**

3

CLASS WORKSHOP

8

Meat vs. Rice: To Our Readers, Introduction, On Boba,
Pidgin Talk on the I0-5, Frank Chin

10

CLASS WORKSHOP

15

Hip Hop Generation, Jeff Chang
Better Luck Tomorrow, film by Justin Lin

17

CLASS WORKSHOP

22

Meat vs. Rice: Selected Readings
Vietnam War Vets, and student readings (from Valerie Matsumoto)

24

CLASS WORKSHOP

29

REAL KARAOKE PEOPLE, Ed Bok Lee

31

CLASS WORKSHOP

APRIL: MAIDEN VOYAGES & PIDGIN IDENTITIES

5

Defection: Christina Yao
Living Postively: Napoleon Lustre

7

On Marriage Equality Debate: Writings by Zia, Cheng, and Introductions
CLASS WORKSHOP

12

Maiden Voyage: Sexuality and Identity Politics in America: Dana Y. Takagi

14

The Slanted Screen: Asian Men in Hollywood (Film)
Class Workshop

19-26, SPRING BREAK - FIRST DRAFT DUE

28

On a Bed of RICE: readings

MAY: DEPORTING OUR SOULS, DEFENDING OUR IMMIGRANTS

3

Deporting Our Souls, Bill Ong Hing

5

Class Workshop

10

We All Make Mistakes: Duc Ta
I am a Man with a Heart, Andrew Thi

12

Class Workshop

17

FINAL PAPER - PUBLIC READING

19

FINAL EXAM

Revised: January 11, 2011