



## Asian American Studies Program (AASP)

Sept. 2007

Issue No. 17

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# Asian American Studies Program Newsletter

# BRIDGES

## Letter from Director: Strange Convergences

Leslie Bow

As the end of spring semester 2007 came to a close, I made two great purchases. No, these were not made in the shoe department of Macy's where I sometimes go against my ethnic upbringing by paying full retail. Rather, these buys represented a strange convergence of things I'd been working on for Asian American Studies. The first purchase was a *paj ntaub* or Hmong embroidered storycloth depicting the Hmong migration from Laos. The second was Gene Yang's graphic novel, *American Born Chinese*.



In the olden days, we used to call them "comics." But I'm certainly for a change in nomenclature if it brings *American Born Chinese* its due as literature. Told in three separate tales all converging in a wonderful twist by the end, the novel is the masculine counterpart to *The Woman Warrior*. It might said to center on the theme, "Be true to yourself," something we like to put in front of young adults subject to pressures to conform. But far from the clichéd homilies that might circulate in young adult fiction, in its new twist on the Monkey King tales, this graphic novel explores issues such as the interplay between appearance and "reality," imposture and white desire, and the nature of the Asian stereotype. The latter is embodied in the figure of the protagonist's annoying "cousin"

visiting from China, Chin Key—that's "chinky" in case you missed the reference.

In the spirit of art and play that the Monkey King represents, the Asian American Studies Program will host **Fred Ho**, composer, political activist, and leader of the Afro Asian Music Ensemble and the Monkey Orchestra in Spring 2008. His presence as an artist-in-residence comes about through **Peggy Choy's** successful grant to the Art Institute. Ho will

also be collaborating with choreographer Choy on her "Women of the Scarred Earth" project supported by Asian American Studies. Through spoken word, music, and dance, the performance tells the stories of women and their survival strategies in times of war and ecological devastation.

This cross-cultural fusion is also something that I have been working on for our curriculum in seeking

partnerships across Ethnic Studies programs and Asian area studies centers. I'm pleased to report that we will be expanding our crosslisted course array with the addition of a belated crosslisting with the Chican@/Latin@ Studies



**American Born Chinese**

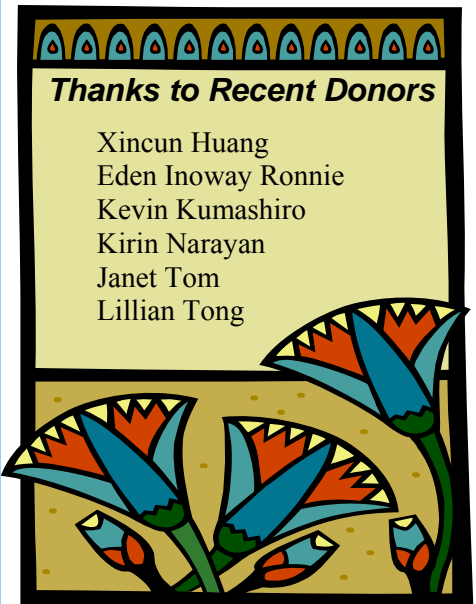
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### Amy Ling Legacy Fund for Asian American Studies

Last year we announced the establishment of a new endowment fund for Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin named in honor of Professor Amy Ling. I'm happy to announce that we are only **\$1,600** short of our goal of achieving a permanent endowment for the Program! The Fund supports community-building functions, lectures, undergraduate scholarships, symposia, and other scholarly activities that enhance our understanding of the Asian diaspora. Please consider a donation. Checks can be made out to:

**Amy Ling Legacy Fund for Asian American Studies  
University of Wisconsin Foundation  
US Bank Lockbox  
PO Box 78807  
Milwaukee, WI 53278-0807**

Donation can also be made online at the Asian American Studies Program's web site: <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/aasp/Donation>



Program/Folklore course, "Introduction to Comparative Ethnic Studies," and the pending crosslisting of the American Indian Studies Program course, "Image-making in the Arts: Language and Vision." Moreover, I'm particularly excited to announce an important addition to our regular core curriculum, "Southeast Asian Refugees of the 'Cold' War" to be taught by **Mike Cullinane**, Associate Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) and faculty affiliate in History. As Director, I have also been collaborating with Center faculty in proposing a Hmong Studies Initiative 2007, which hopes to establish Hmong Studies at UW-Madison. Such collaborations strengthen the intellectual reach of the Program while confirming its shared relationship with both Ethnic Studies and Southeast Asian Studies. Ironically, many of the themes encompassed by these curricular collaborations—diaspora, art-making, immigration, and visual literacy—come together in the form of the *paj ntaub*. The Hmong storycloth that I purchased in spring raises exactly



those issues in its depiction of trauma and migration within the traditional textile design.

In what ways does the storycloth constitute an alternative form of literacy? The person to ask would most certainly be Professor **Morris Young**, a specialist in composition and rhetoric, literacy studies, and Asian American literature. As the Program looks into the future, the brightest spot is most certainly the addition of Professor Young who will be joining our affiliate faculty in 2007-08 as the new Director of English 100 in the Department of English. Born in Hawaii but most recently coming from Miami University, Ohio as an associate professor, he is no stranger to the Midwest. An award-winning scholar, Professor Young does work in Asian American Studies that poses challenging questions about dialect, language, popular culture, and the ways in which communities of color engage nontraditional forms of literacy. Look for his new courses on Asian American rhetoric in 2007-2008.

This upcoming year, we also welcome back **Victor Jew** as a lecturer in the Program. Victor is well-known within the Asian American Studies community here as he received his doctorate from UW Madison in History in 1994. He brings to our curriculum an expertise in constitutional law as well as in Asian American history with an emphasis on the American Midwest. We are also pleased to welcome **Eden Inoway Ronnie** to our program advisory committee. Eden brings her administrative expertise to our program as the executive assistant to the Provost.

Along the theme of return, the Asian American Studies Program also hosted Professor **Shilpa Davé**, Department of American Studies, Brandeis University, for a talk last fall. Many of you will recognize Shilpa not only for her support of the Program during Amy Ling's directorship, but through her longstanding connection to Madison, her hometown. Her talk, "What's an Asian Man?: Masculinity, Gender, and the Asian America" addressed many of the issues posed by *American Born Chinese* in her exploration of media depictions of Asian American

*(Continued on page 10)*

# Asian American Studies Program Faculty & Advisory Committee

**Victor Bascara (on leave)**

Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Asian American Studies Program

**Leslie Bow**

Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Asian American Studies Program

**Birgit Brander-Rasmussen**

Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
Chican@/Latina@ Studies Prog

**Lisa Bu**

Producer, Wisconsin Public Radio  
Asian American Studies Program

**Cindy I-Fen Cheng**

Assistant Professor  
Department of History  
Asian American Studies Program

**Peggy Choy**

Lecturer, Dance Program  
Center for Southeast Asian Studies

**Mike Cullinane**

Associate Director  
Center for Southeast Asian Studies  
Lecturer, Department of History

**Grace Kyungwon Hong (on leave)**

Associate Professor  
Department of English  
Asian American Studies Program

**Nicole Huang**

Associate Professor  
Department of East Asian  
Languages and Literature

**Victor Jew**

Lecturer  
Asian American Studies Program

**Ella Mae Matsumura**

Associate Professor  
School of Business

**Jan Miyasaki**

Lecturer  
Asian American Studies Program

**Pamela Oliver**

Professor  
Department of Sociology

**Eden Inoway Ronnie**

Executive assistant to Provost  
Office of the Provost

**Hemant Shah**

Professor  
School of Journalism and Mass  
Communication

**Michael C. Thornton**

Professor  
Department of Afro-American  
Studies

**Lillian Tong**

Instructional Program Manager  
Center for Biology Education

**Lynet Uttal**

Associate Professor  
School of Human Ecology

**Morris Young**

Visiting Associate Professor  
Department of English

**Asian Pacific American Students Council (APAC)**

Two representatives

**Association for Asian American Graduate Students (AAAGS)**

Mytoan Nguyen & Gil Jose  
Co-Chairs

## Welcome

### Morris Young!

Joining the affiliate faculty of the Asian American Studies Program in the Fall, Morris Young is the incoming Director of English 100 and associate professor of English. Formerly at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, Professor Young brings to the Program expertise in composition and rhetoric, literacy studies, and Asian American literature with an interest in Hawai'i and the indigenous sovereignty movement.

His essays and reviews have appeared in *College English*, *Journal of Basic Writing*, *Amerasia*, *Composition Forum*, and he has contributed chapters to many edited collections. His book, *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as Rhetoric of Citizenship* (Southern Illinois UP, 2004) received the 2004 W. Ross Winterowd Award for the most outstanding book in composition theory from *JAC: A Quarterly Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Rhetoric, Literacy, Culture, and Politics*, the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition, and the 2006 Outstanding Book Award from the



Conference on College Composition and Communication. **Join us in welcoming Professor Young to the University of Wisconsin, Madison community.** ■

# Asian American Studies Events



Asian American Voices Forum



Audience at the Asian American Voices Forum



"Women of the Scarred Earth" spring dance performance directed and produced by Peggy Choy



Chinese New Year Potluck organized by the Association of Asian American Graduate Students (AAAGS)



Asian American students discussed Chinese Culture with McFarland High School students.



Prof. Shilpa Dave of Brandeis University, the guest lecturer of "What's an Asian Man?"



Lecturer Atsushi Tajima and students



AAAGS gathering at the Union Terrace

## Co-Sponsored Events 2006-07

**April 26, 2007**

### ***Asian American Voices***

Forum organized by the Association of Asian American Graduate Students (AAAGS).

**April 18, 2007**

### ***Annual Faculty and Graduate Student Dinner and Dialogue***

Discussion about transitions from graduate life to professional or academic life.

**April 12-15, 2007**

### ***Asian American Film Series 2007: Diaspora Melancholy***

Our 8-film series was part of the 2007 Wisconsin Film Festival.

**March 21, 2007**

### ***An Evening of Cambodian Music***

Performance by an ensemble of Cambodian master musicians.

**March 2 & 16, 2007**

### ***"Women of the Scarred Earth" Dance Performance***

Peggy Choy is the director, producer, and performing artist of this performance and outreach project.

**February 17, 2007**

### ***Chinese New Year Potluck***

Organized by the Association of Asian American Graduate Students (AAAGS).

**October 3, 2006**

### ***Discussing Chinese culture***

Lisa Bu, Kasey Kajiwara, and Daisy Du talked with McFarland high school students

**October 3, 2006**

### ***What's an Asian Man?***

Guest lecture by Prof. Shilpa Dave of Brandeis University.

## Upcoming Spring 2008

### *Afro-Asian Multidisciplinary Performance Workshop: Revolutionary Sound and Word*

Mr. Ho will be in residence for the spring 2008 semester, hosted by the Asian American Studies Program, and co-sponsored by the School of Music, with subsidiary co-sponsorship by the Dance Program, Department of Theatre and Drama, and the Department of Afro-American Studies. He will teach one 3-credit course, "Afro-Asian Multidisciplinary Performance Workshop: Revolutionary Sound and Word," a multidisciplinary course to be offered as a topics course in Asian American Studies meeting with courses in Afro-American Studies, the Dance Program and the School of Music. The course will produce a performance piece that integrates music, movement, theater



**Fred Ho**

and text. The new student work will be performed in the concert, "Revolutionary Earth Music: People and the Planet Before Profit," that highlights his Afro Asian Music Ensemble and a new dance piece by Peggy Choy, on March 7, 2008, 8 pm in the Wisconsin Union Theater. For more information, contact liaison Peggy Choy (pachoy@wisc.edu).

Fred Ho is a one-of-a-kind revolutionary Chinese American baritone saxophonist, composer, writer, producer, political activist and leader of the Afro Asian Music Ensemble and the Monkey Orchestra. For two decades, Fred Ho has

innovated a new American multicultural music imbedded in the most soulful and transgressive forms of African American music with musical influences of Asia and the Pacific Rim. Mr. Ho's numerous awards include the prestigious McKnight Foundation Composer/Residency award, 5 Rockefeller Foundation grants, 2 National Endowment for the Arts fellowships, 3 New York Foundation for the Arts Music Composition fellowships, the 1988 Duke Ellington Distinguished Artist Lifetime Achievement Award from the Black Musicians Conference, and the 1987 Harvard University Peter Ivers Visiting Artist award.

Mr. Ho has taught on topics ranging from the performing arts to ethnic studies and cultural studies. He has been in residence at numerous college campuses including Northeastern University, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, the New College of California Arts and Social Change Program, Stanford University, and Harvard University. ■

### *Hmong Studies Initiative*

In 2006-2007, we witnessed many events and controversies surrounding the Hmong American community in Wisconsin. Not the least of these was the classroom climate incident at the UW Law School. Misunderstanding surrounding the Hmong community in Wisconsin underscores the need for scholarship that can address issues of cultural difference on behalf of all communities in the state. With this in mind, in summer 07, the Asian American Studies Program and Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS) in consultation with Hmong American students and community members placed before Chancellor Wiley a proposal to establish Hmong Studies on campus.

The proposal establishes two phases, one that calls for hiring faculty with expertise in Hmong Studies and sets the groundwork for a certificate program, and another that seeks the long-term implementation of Hmong Studies incorporating community-based learning across Schools. The initiative represents a productive response to recent concerns over Hmong inclusion, representation, and misrecognition that have become part of public discourse involving the University. The primary author of the proposal, **Marlys Macken**, Professor of Linguistics and faculty member of CSEAS, notes that the proposal highlights attempts to integrate Hmong Studies into the curriculum over the past twenty years, efforts that gained renewed force most dramatically in Spring 2007. Committed to exploring panethnic approaches to racialization, the Asian American Studies Program supports the call to develop courses and nurture scholars invested in Hmong American history and culture. In July 2007 in a community forum, Chancellor Wiley announced his support of Hmong Studies at the University of Wisconsin and has taken immediate steps to hire a language instructor in the fall.

# Diaspora Melancholy: Asian American Film Series 2007

Leslie Bow

On the streets of New York, a homeless man draws swirling dragons, glorious landscapes, and cats—hundreds of curious, vibrant cats, full of life. As filmmaker Linda Hattendorf discovers when she takes him in, this Japanese American artist has a backstory.

Punctuated by uprooting, incarceration, abandonment, and nuclear annihilation, Mirikitani's past would be both a warning and a reproach, but it is instead an affirmation--of commitment, of art, of the beauty and indifference of cats.



**The Cats of Mirikitani**

On the streets of New York, the man who sells coffee and bagels from the corner pushcart also has a past. His former identity as a Pakistani rock star, the "Bono of Lahore," is one he chooses to disavow, only to find that others won't let it go.

In post-9/11 Seattle, a Cambodian family man is deported as his former life as an urban gang-member comes back to haunt him. Separated from his wife and children, he finds himself making life anew and alone, somewhere in a rice field outside Phnom Penh.



These are some of the stories told in this year's Asian American Film Series as part of the Wisconsin Film Festival. The cumulative narrative these films tell is that even as a new life is sought, the old one—and the people we were within it—is never wholly discarded or lost. The past in

these films lingers as a haunting, unburied presence. The films strike a melancholy note in the diaspora, but a hopeful one as well.

Asian American film is about transition. The films in "Diaspora Melancholy" depict the rough moments of multiple forms of movement: from Asia to the U.S., from old world to new, from boy to man, from wannabe to world champion, from death to resurrection. In the diaspora, in movement, what is lost and what is gained? At stake in all of these portrayals of transition is the question of masculinity and manhood, whether it is represented as a crisis between stoicism and

feeling; of providing for one's family or the risk of its loss; of virility and fulfilled desire; of symbolic impotence or empowerment. At the center of some of these films is a self-conscious question about how Asian American men are represented in American culture; at the center of others lies a more subtle rendering of the similar queries: How can an Asian "be a man" in the U.S.? How can one "be a man" if mourning loss; how can anyone simply get over it?

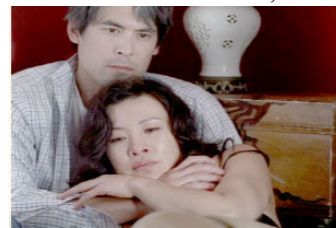
Tanuj Chopra's *Punching at the Sun* approaches these questions with lyricism and grace. Focusing on a

*desi* youth's attempts to come to terms with his brother's violent death in the family's mom-and-pop store in Queens, the film reaches beyond ethnic family melodrama or depictions of quirky ethnic



**Punching at the Sun**

eccentrics to provide a meditation on South Asian American street culture and one teen's struggle with melancholic loss. Mameet faces the challenge of coming-of-age in a world where brown cannot signify between black and white, where he is neither a child nor yet a man, and where he is not really a lover nor a simply a friend. Eric Byler's new film, *Americanese*, based on Shawn



**Americanese**

Wong's novel, *American Knees* (1995), likewise poses provocative questions about masculinity, race, politics, and desire. The protagonist, Raymond, a Chinese American

man in mid-life, searches for intimacy and connection in a culture that divides Asian American men from Asian American women. How can Raymond hope to find love if the ghosts of past relationships and individual histories rear up to compromise the present?

Melancholia is likewise the subject of Ramin Bahrani's *Man Push Cart*, which tells the story of Ahmad, a former Pakistani singer now reduced to selling coffee and bagels, and hawking porn on the side. It is not only the memory of past glory that he must overcome in order to move forward in this new world, but the death of his wife. The instruments of change symbolically appear in the form of a beautiful Spanish immigrant manning a neighboring

push cart, and a wealthy Pakistani who wants to bankroll Ahmad’s comeback. The film poses a fundamental question about immigration and life in the diaspora, whether it represents a comedown and a net loss, or the very possibility of renewal and a better life.

From all external appearances, for Jimmy Mirikitani, it would, at first glance, appear to be the former, a net loss. Aged and living on the street, the

Japanese American artist is a fixture on a Manhattan corner where he waves away offers of help or money for his drawings of cats. This is where filmmaker Linda Hattendorf finds him in the wake of 9/11. In an extraordinary act of charity, she takes him in and follows a weak paper-trail to uncover his identity. Her film tells the story of a family annihilated in Hiroshima, the

injustice of Japanese American internment, and in a less historical, but no less compelling narrative, how to get a talented but stubborn homeless man off her sofa and out of her apartment. This life-affirming film draws an overt parallel between

measures taken in the wake of 9/11 to safeguard American domestic space and the travesty of Japanese American incarceration during World War II in the wake of Pearl Harbor. Ironically, it is the figure of this anonymous, wizened homeless man that initiates a bigger narrative about history and its cautionary lessons, but also about community, resilience, and charity.



**Sentenced Home**

A cautionary tale also lies at the heart of the documentary film, *Sentenced Home*, in which directors David Grabias and Nicole Newnham profile three Cambodian refugees subjected to inhumane immigration laws newly enforced in the wake of 9/11.

Fleeing the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and settling in the U.S. as youths, the three men portrayed have one thing in common: they were convicted of felonies after being drawn into gang life as teens. The story begins, however, after Sept. 2001 when the U.S. put pressure on Cambodia to accept deportees; as a result, having done their

time in American prison as teenagers years before, the three men face deportation to a “home” they can no longer recall. In both *The Cats of Mirikitani* and *Sentenced Home*, a focus on Asian immigrants unearths not simply the individual life but the ways in which the

individual story is enmeshed with history—and made to bear the brunt of history, whether Hiroshima, the Killing Fields, or 9-11. At times of domestic crisis, who is the enemy going to be? What will he look like?

Even in death, the body can be resurrected—if it is useful. Justin

Lin’s new film, *Finishing the Game*, demonstrates this to comic effect by spoofing Hollywood’s attempts to exploit Bruce Lee’s image by releasing Lee’s posthumous film using



**Finishing the Game**

a stand-in. Reuniting the cast of *Better Luck Tomorrow*, Lin imagines the attempts to replace the “real” Bruce as farce. In the process, he lampoons the narrow box into which the dominant culture places Asian American men. So who wants to be the New Bruce? And is that question supposed to be funny, sad, or both? The film is a comic reminder of why

we can’t let Bruce Lee go.

Hollywood’s “slanted” bias against Asian Americans in the media is also the subject of



**The Slanted Screen**

Jeff Adachi’s documentary, *The Slanted Screen*. Why are there so few images of Asian American men in the media? And why are they so bad? Adachi traces positive—and rare—models in the careers of actors Sessue Hayakawa and James Shigeta. Their positive conceptions of (predominantly East) Asian masculinity are countered by the long tradition of Hollywood yellow face—white actors playing “Orientals”—and the Fu Man Chu-Mr. Moto-Charlie Chan dirty tricks

of the silver screen. The documentary uncovers some fascinating footage in the history of racial imagery and American film. It poses questions about difference and masculinity that can



**Air Guitar Nation**

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**Diaspora Melancholy: Asian American Film Series 2007**

- Americanese
- Finishing the Game
- Man Push Cart
- Punching at the Sun
- Air Guitar Nation
- The Cats of Mirikitani
- Sentenced Home
- The Slanted Screen

# 2006-07 Asian American Studies Certificate Awardees

The Asian American Studies Program congratulates the following students for the successful completion of the Asian American Studies Certificate this year.

- **Aaron Ginster**  
Biology/Bacteriology
- **Nicole Hilderhof**  
Theatre/Drama
- **Katheryn Kayser**  
Biology
- **Riamsalio Phetchareun**  
International Studies
- **Kristopher Rossie**  
Psychology
- **Susan Traul**  
Legal Studies/Journalism
- **Mai Vang**  
English
- **Va Xiong**  
Biology



We posed some questions to our two certificate awardees, Riemsalio Kao Phetchareun and Kristopher Rossie. Here is what they had to say:

### What made you decide to undertake the concentration?

**Riamsalio:** My family are first

generation Asian Americans. My parents came from Laos in 1986 when I was two. I've always been interested in Asian American history. I remember wanting to learn more about it in high school. But the textbook didn't have much. I took Asian American 101 during my very first semester here. It was very good. I decided to get the certificate during the junior year. I changed my major six times, but never changed my mind about getting the AASP certificate. That the only thing I've kept in four years.

**Kristopher:** Honestly, the ethnic studies requirement that UW has led me down the AAS concentration path. It was luck. I took one class, loved it, had room for a concentration, and I never looked back since.

### What is the most valuable thing that you took away from your classes in Asian American Studies?

**Riamsalio:** I learned more about the whole distinction between Asians and Asian Americans, how the classification came to be, the different groups in the categories, the difference and commonality especially today in the popular culture. Before

***The classes I took have literally transformed me into a different mindset to be more aware of what is going on in the world around me.***  
– Kristopher Rossie

classes I didn't really how someone could mistake Southern Asians as Eastern Asians. Now I realize it's more of a political classification of Asian Americans. Different ethnic Asian American groups share the same



**Riamsalio Phetchareun**

political background. I notice more how different Asian American communities interact with one another, and with the wider American society.

**Kristopher:** This is a little harder to sum up what I have learned in a few sentences. You learn it takes effort to gain knowledge about how the world really works. You learn life lessons that go way beyond the scope of one classroom. The classes I took have literally transformed me into a different mindset to be more aware of what is going on in the world around me. So I guess what I'm

saying is that the most valuable thing I learned is that every facet of our world

The UW Association of Asian American Graduate Students is an organization comprised of Asian American graduate students and allies of all disciplines at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is committed in four core areas of social support to graduate students; academic support; fostering relationships with undergraduate Asian American students and leaders; and connecting with the Asian American community of Madison and throughout Wisconsin. AAAGS is open to all UW-Madison graduate students interested in Asian-American cultures and activities.

**Web:** <http://aaags.rso.wisc.edu>



is shaped in a way that hinders some groups from living and it is up to us to take the responsibility to learn and do something about it.

**What are your future plans? How might our concentration in Asian American Studies enhance the way you think about the field you've chosen?**

**Riamsalio:** I plan to get a Masters degree in public affairs. I want to do a policy analysis project in Southeast Asia that uses my economics background to study some aspects of Southeast Asian Americans and Asian Americans in general. The certificate is worthwhile because it gives me a broader view of U.S history, a different perspective from a group's view that makes the context of U.S. history more relevant.

**Kristopher:** Well after graduation I plan to take one or two years and get a



**Kristopher Rossie**

job in some type of non-profit organization and then apply to graduate school in hopes of obtaining my PhD in psychology. The concentration is important because even within our own psychology department there is a lack of classes pertaining to non-white groups. Nearly every psychology article I've read concerning Asian Americans ends with more research needs to be conducted, and especially conducted with mental health professionals who have a more complete understanding of the key factors that cause Asian American mental health issues. Overall, I just don't see how learning an in-depth history about another group of people can ever hurt you in whichever direction

you go towards. ■

*(Continued from page 7)*

## Diaspora Melancholy

also be left to your judgment: *Mortal Kombat*—positive image of a powerful Asian villain “with balls” or just another trucked-up Fu Man Chu? Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle? What’s up with that, son? Fulfilling the stereotype or turning it on its head? You be the judge. Bigotry can be funny, too. Just ask Long Duc Dong and Michael Richards.

*Air Guitar Nation* gives us another set of questions to ponder about masculinity, racialization, and laughing “at” or “with” Asian American protagonists. As the documentary reveals, a second-generation Korean American, the self-styled “C-Diddy,” aspires to be the best at something—in this case, not the Westinghouse Science Competition, but the title, “Air Guitar World Champion.” Can C-Diddy represent his country in the battle for air guitar global supremacy? And is his Hello Kitty-clad presence a shattering of Asian male stereotypes or one more example for Adachi’s hall of shame? A fascinating glimpse into the psyches of rock star wannabees and the mildly talented, Alexandra Lipsitz’s documentary follows in the recent tradition of loving, yet ironic portrayals of American subcultures and the committed—obsessed?—folk who populate them. You may well ask, “Why is *Air Guitar Nation* part of an Asian American Film Festival?” The answer goes back to a question posed in *The Slanted Screen*: when are Asian Americans going to be “just people” in American film? Is it

noteworthy that in Lipsitz’s work race is not an issue? Can a Korean American represent all Americans? If the subject is air guitar, apparently the answer is, “Yes.”

In one way or another, whether subtle or covert, the films in the 2007 Asian American Film Series pose questions about social justice for all Americans. In asking their audiences to think about what they expect to see in images of Asians in dominant culture, some of these films put pressure on conceptions of who counts as “really” American. Others, like *Sentenced Home* and *The Cats of Mirikitani*, take as their subject the privileges of citizenship and the vulnerability of communities of color to the state intrusion. And they do so in same way that all films do: by asking us to witness the lives of others in the search for security, fulfillment, love, a space beyond grief—and for home.

So as entertaining as all these new, independent films might be, they also pose thought-provoking questions about our mundane fascinations or about the inner life and past of someone you might pass by on the street. Whether humorous or hauntingly melancholic, uplifting or cautionary, these films challenge our reverence towards the idea of “America” and its use as the symbol for a clean start. Depicting Asians many generations here and new

***In asking their audiences to think about what they expect to see in images of Asians in dominant culture, some of these films put pressure on conceptions of who counts as “really” American.***

— Leslie Bow

immigrants as well, the films in *Diaspora Melancholy* show their subjects to be both holding onto and letting go of the past. They are populated by protagonists who are, in the words of novelist Bharati Mukherjee, “greedy with wants and reckless from hope.” ■

# New Courses

## *AAS 240: Asian American History: Movement & Dislocation: Asian American History and Its Patterns*

(Fall 2007)

Taught by **Victor Jew**, this one semester survey of Asian American history emphasizes the long roots of the Asian American past in U.S. history. In the process of exploring themes that cover immigration, 19th and 20th century



transnational forces and the formation of different communities, this course will examine unexplored or

rarely-studied topics in Asian American history such as the patterns of nineteenth century anti-Asian violence and the local dynamics of Asian America that existed “east of California,” specifically in the U.S. Midwest.

## *AAS 260: Topics in Asian American Culture: Exclusions, Inclusions and In Between: The Role of Law in Asian America’s Making*

(Fall 2007)

Taught by **Victor Jew**, this one semester survey examines the way the law affected Asian American communities from the nineteenth-century to the present. In turn, it will also study the contributions that Asian Americans made to the understanding of the United States Constitution when they litigated their rights in numerous

lawsuits. This course will complement other Asian American Studies courses by highlighting and studying in depth the legal traces that often act as background hauntings in Asian American public memories, texts, and cultural productions.

## *AAS 246: Southeast Asian Refugees of the “Cold” War*

(Spring 2008)

Between 1975 and 1990, over a million Southeast Asians migrated to the United States from the three former French colonies frequently referred to collectively as

Indochina: Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

Most of these migrants came as refugees and added four new major ethnic groups to American society: Hmong, Khmer, Lao, and Vietnamese, including among them ethnic Chinese and the children of American military personnel, generally referred to as "Amerasians." Taught by **Mike Cullinane**, this course is intended to provide a better understanding of the conditions that led these people to flee their homelands in Southeast Asia and eventually take refuge and start new lives in the United States, as well as in the other countries that offered asylum. ■



(Continued from page 2)

# Strange Convergences

masculinity. Please read on for other events co-sponsored by the program, including the most powerful and

evocative Asian American Film Series to date.

We will also bid a fond farewell to two mainstays of our program, **Katie Oriedo** and **Atsushi Tajima**. Our longtime program assistant, Katie will retire this summer. For those of you who have been touched by Katie’s cheerfulness and warmth in her role as the public face of our Program, please drop her a line and express your appreciation for the work she’s accomplished at UW. I also want to congratulate (now) Professor Atsushi Tajima our former graduate assistant and lecturer who will be joining the faculty of State University of New York, Geneseo as assistant professor in the Department of Communication.

Last year’s work bears fruit in our new array of courses for 2007-2008 including those taught by **Professor Cindy Cheng** in History (160: Asian American History: Movement and Dislocation; 161: Asian American History: Settlement and National Belonging; 930: Asian American History and Culture) as well as a new course that I offer in English (654: Race and Sexuality in American Literature). Please take a look at our ever-updated (thank you, **Lisa Bu**) website as well as the final page of this newsletter for the full list of newly-approved and pending courses. Finally, congratulations go out to all our concentrators who have earned certificates in Asian American Studies in the spring.

As in Yang’s novel, while doing Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin at times appears to involve the interplay between appearance and “reality,” imposture and white desire, and the nature of the Asian stereotype, we nevertheless move forward and enter the new academic year with requisite goodbyes, with glad returns, and with new faces. ■



## Asian American Studies Certificate Program

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
303 Ingraham Hall (608) 263-2976

The Asian American Studies certificate program provides students with an opportunity to develop a sustained intellectual focus on Asian American racial formation, history, literature, and culture. Interdisciplinary in nature, the certificate can be obtained by completing 15 credits of coursework.

The certificate program is open to any undergraduate student regardless of major or college who has an interest in Asian American Studies and is in good academic standing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Interested students should contact the Asian American Studies Program (303 Ingraham Hall) and meet with the Director to discuss their study plans and file a Certificate Declaration form. While many of the courses below are crosslisted, registration under the Asian American Studies portion of the timetable ensures that credits earned for the certificate are recognized by the Registrar's office upon filing a Certificate Declaration form. Not all courses are offered each semester.

### Requirements:

To earn a Certificate in Asian American Studies, a student must earn a minimum GPA of 2.75 in 15 credits of coursework:

#### ⇒ 3 credits of foundation

ASIAN AM 101 Introduction to Asian American Studies

#### ⇒ 9 credits of "core courses" devoted exclusively to Asian American issues

ASIAN AM 153 Asian American Movement  
 ASIAN AM 160 Asian American History: Movement and Dislocation  
 ASIAN AM 161 Asian American History: Settlement and National Belonging  
 ASIAN AM 210 Asian American Popular Culture  
 ASIAN AM 230 Topics in Comparative Asian American Studies  
 ASIAN AM 240 Topics in Asian American Studies  
 ASIAN AM 246\* Southeast Asian Refugees of the "Cold" War  
 ASIAN AM 252 Gender and Sexuality in Asian American Literature and Culture  
 ASIAN AM 260 Topics in Asian American Culture  
 ASIAN AM 270 Survey of Asian American Literature  
 ASIAN AM 430 Asian American Cultural Studies  
 ASIAN AM 510\* Race and Media Culture in the U.S.  
 ASIAN AM 540 Special Topics  
 ASIAN AM 560 Topics in Humanities  
 ASIAN AM 595 Asian American Women Writers  
 ASIAN AM 699 Independent Study: Directed Readings in Asian American Studies

#### ⇒ 3 credits of "comparative" courses

ASIAN AM 102 Introduction to Comparative Ethnic Studies  
 ASIAN AM 220 Ethnic Movements in the United States  
 ASIAN AM 300\* Image-making in the Arts: Language and Vision  
 ASIAN AM 443 Mutual Perceptions of Racial Minorities  
 ASIAN AM 654 Race and Sexuality in American Literature  
 ASIAN AM 662 Mass Media and Minorities  
 History 244 Introduction to Southeast Asia: Vietnam to the Philippines  
 HDFS 474 Racial Ethnic Families in the U.S. (HDSF: Human Development and Family Studies)  
 E ASIAN 520 Popular Culture and Film in Twentieth Century China

Other courses in Afro-American Studies, American Indian Studies, Chican@/Latin@ Studies, East Asian Languages and Literature, or Languages and Cultures of Asia may count towards the fulfillment of the comparative requirement. Students must file a DARs exception form with the program Director in order to approve the substitution.

\*New Courses Pending

**Asian American Studies Program**

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
303 Ingraham hall  
1155 Observatory Drive  
Madison, WI 53706

ADDRESS CORRECTION  
REQUESTED



**Asian American Studies Program**  
**University of Wisconsin-Madison**

**Mission Statement**

The Asian American Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison is an interdisciplinary program committed to teaching and scholarship about Asians in the U.S., and to programming cultural events promoting Asian American issues and creative arts. It seeks to educate about the processes of racialization, systems of representation, economic structures, and domestic and foreign policies that impact immigrant populations. In addition to a core faculty, the Program draws upon the interests and expertise of affiliated faculty and academic staff across disciplines and academic units.

The Asian American Studies Program offers an array of courses devoted to the historical, political, literary, sociological, psychological, artistic, and educational concerns of Asian Americans. The Program sponsors lectures, readings, and performances that enhance the work it does in the classroom, including an annual Asian American Film Festival. It maintains a collection of book and video resources to benefit education about Asian American communities. The Program's scholarly mission extends to both the University community and well beyond it.

Visit our website: <http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/aasp/>