This course is a multidisciplinary overview of Asian American studies and what I will call its three phases of intellectual formation: essentialism, strategic essentialism, and post-essentialism. In the past forty years of Asian American studies, it’s arguable that essentialism—the belief that there is such a thing as an Asian American-dominated and defined the field for two decades. Essentialism is hardly over, but still continues as a powerful force in the field of Asian American studies, in community politics, in new ethnic formations, in organizing, and so on. Strategic essentialism has dominated the academic field since the early 1990s, and arguably still does today, the principle that even if there is no such thing as an Asian American, the concept is crucial and useful as a mode of analysis and activism. In the last decade, post-essentialism has emerged through various attempts to criticize the necessity and utility of Asian American identity and formation. These attempts include poststructuralist critiques of the field and efforts to expand it transnationally and cross-racially, as well as efforts to foreground issues of ideology and political practice over identity, foregrounding pressing issues like war, violence, religion, queerness, imperialism and indigeneity. Furthermore, the rising importance of Asian American subgroups like Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong, Filipinos, Indians, and more mean that older assumptions based on the historical experiences of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans are being challenged, particularly as 19th and early 20th century immigration models of Asian American formation are contested by refugees, exiles, diasporics, flexible citizens, adoptees, mixed-race peoples, and transnationals, to name just a few possibilities. This course does not suggest an inevitable movement from essentialism to strategic essentialism to post-essentialism; rather, it proposes that these emphases are more like Raymond Williams’ residual, dominant and emergent structures of feeling, existing simultaneously. Our task in the course is survey the intellectual genealogy of the field of Asian American studies and understand the possibilities and limitations of these different structures. Hence, we will be reading both well-established and influential texts (mostly in excerpts) as well as more recent ones arguing for new directions in the field, and possibly even challenge the existence or viability of Asian American studies.

Requirements: this is a readings course, so there is no research paper. Instead, students will present once or twice on a book (depending on the number of students in the course) and write a book review of 1,000 words for each book presented on (no more than two).

Reading list (subject to change; contact me if you have concerns or recommendations about texts):

1. Dylan Rodriguez, *Suspended Apocalypse: White Supremacy, Genocide and the Filipino Condition*
2. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*
6. Augusto Espiritu, *Five Faces of Exile: The Nation and Filipino American Intellectuals*
7. Bill Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*
8. Shu-Mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*
10. Siu, Lok C. D. *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama*