COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
Immigration and the Transformation of American Society
Spring 2015

Instructor: Van C. Tran
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Course time: Mondays & Wednesdays, 8:40-9:55 a.m.
Location: Fayerweather 313
Office hours: Wednesdays, 4:15-6:15 p.m. Please sign up here.
Website: https://courseworks.columbia.edu/portal/site/SOCIW3214_001_2015_1/
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“Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.” - Oscar Handlin’s The Uprooted (1951:1)

Course Description:

In 2010, one in eight residents of the United States was born outside of the country. The arrival of these newcomers affects the cultural, economic, political and social dynamics of our society. Since immigration shows no signs of slowing down—in the United States or in many other countries of the world—the causes, consequences and repercussions of immigration will be one of the most important topics of the 21st century.

The course will proceed in four parts. In the first part, we begin the class by looking at why people move and the immigration policies that let some people in while keeping others out. In the second part, we will consider assimilation and incorporation, the processes by which immigrants and their children become integrated into American society and its implications for the future of ethnic and racial inequality. We will explore how sociologists theorize, measure, and evaluate immigrant incorporation. In particular, we will focus on competing predictions about second-generation decline versus second-generation advantage. In the third part, we will discuss the growth in the unauthorized population, their experiences in the United States and the contentious politics surrounding them. We will spend some time talking about new immigrant destinations and how they might differ from traditional gateways of immigration. In the final part, we will address how immigration is reshaping the color line and the future of American society. This course will primarily focus on the United States, not on the impact of migration on those left behind.

There are no prerequisites to the course and it is open to all undergraduates. Because immigration is an interdisciplinary field of study, the course welcomes students from diverse backgrounds, including sociology, urban studies, political science, economics, psychology, social anthropology and history. Students may also audit the course with the permission of the instructor.
Course Objectives:

In this course on immigration, we will:
1. Develop an understanding of major trends on contemporary immigration.
2. Become familiar with key theoretical debates on immigrant assimilation.
3. Explore key concepts through which sociologists study the experience of immigrants.
4. Gain hands-on experience doing some empirical research on the topic of immigration.

Course Requirements:

1. Class participation (15% of final grade)
2. Three short papers (15% each of final grade)
3. Take-home final exam (40% of final grade)

Three Short Papers

More details about each of these three assignments will be distributed in class. You will be expected to do some original research and to write approximately 6–8 pages per assignment.

1. Neighborhood memo of an immigrant neighborhood in New York City, due February 23
2. Interview paper with an immigrant about the immigrant experience, due March 23
3. Policy memo to an elected official advising a stance on immigration reform, due April 20

Take-home Final Exam

The final exam will cover materials from the entire course. It will be distributed in class on May 4 and will be due on May 11 at 5 p.m. There will be three essay questions requiring a synthesis of the course readings, lectures, and class discussions.

Course Policies:

1. Doing the reading is essential to your comprehension and participation in class. Some questions to ponder for each reading assignment include: What data and methodology is employed by the author? What is the main argument or thesis? What claims are being made by the author? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s argument? Do you agree or disagree with the author? If so, why? How does the reading relate to the lecture materials? How does it relate to current events or public opinion? Thinking about and answering these questions will help prepare you for class discussions and written assignments.

2. Please complete assigned readings before each class and come prepared to discuss them. Everyone should join in, even those who are naturally shy. The quality of your comments is more important than the quantity. Your active participation in class is strongly encouraged. I will set aside some time during my lectures for discussion, so you can raise any questions that you might have then. If you don’t understand something, it is often the case that some of your classmates might also have the same questions, but they might be too shy to ask them. By raising questions about the reading materials, you will help all of us to learn better.
3. I am happy to meet with you individually during my office hours to answer questions on any aspects of the course. I also would like to get to know you, to learn more about your interests and to see how I can help you. I would encourage you to sign up for a 15-minute appointment with me early on in the semester. Before major assignment deadlines, I will make an effort to provide extra office hours, but it is always best to plan ahead if you anticipate needing any help. I would like you to perform as well as you can in my course, so please do not hesitate to ask questions and to get feedback on your work. Your teaching fellow could be a great resource, so I would encourage you to approach her as well.

4. Paper assignments should be submitted in hard copy and are due on **Mondays at 5 p.m.** You may submit them in class, to your teaching fellow or to Professor Tran’s mailbox in 501 Knox in the department of sociology. Recognizing that we all have busy lives and balance multiple commitments, you will be allowed one 48-hour no-question-asked extension on one of your papers (but not on the final exam). Beyond this allowance, late assignments will receive a lower grade. **No further extensions will be granted**, except in the case of serious illness. If you are ill, you should go to see your physician and provide a note to support any extension request.

5. Technology in the classroom can be both a blessing and a real distraction. If you would like to use your laptop during class, I would recommend that you turn off your internet browsers and email clients. **Laptops should be used for note-taking purposes only** and we will rely on the honor code for the reinforcement of this rule. Please help me and your classmates in our effort to create a classroom environment that is truly conducive to learning and sharing.

**Course Materials:**

*Books to purchase*

Available at Book Culture at 536 W. 112th St. and on reserve at Lehman Social Sciences Library


*Articles*

All other readings (articles and chapters) will be made available via the course website in PDF.
COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1: Immigrant America
Wednesday, January 21


Week 2: Immigration History, 1880-1924
Monday, January 26
Wednesday, January 28


Week 3: Immigration History, 1924-1965
Monday, February 2
Wednesday, February 4


Faculty Guest: Professor Mae Ngai (Lung Family Professor of Asian American Studies and Professor of History, Columbia University)

Week 4: Immigration History, 1965-present
Monday, February 9
Wednesday, February 11


Week 5: Immigrant New York, 1880-1924
Holiday, February 16
Wednesday, February 18

Week 6: Immigrant New York, 1965-present
Monday, February 23
Wednesday, February 25
First paper due on Monday, February 23


Week 7: Assimilation and Transnationalism
Monday, March 2
Wednesday, March 4


Week 8: Second-Generation Decline
Monday, March 9
Wednesday, March 11


Spring Recess: Happy Spring Break!

Week 9: Second-Generation Advantage
Monday, March 23
Wednesday, March 25
Second paper due on Monday, March 23


Week 10: Second-Generation Achievement
Monday, March 30
Wednesday, April 1


Week 11: Citizenship and Participation
Monday, April 6
Wednesday, April 8


Week 12: The Undocumented Experience
Monday, April 13
Wednesday, April 15


Week 13: New Immigrant Destinations
Monday, April 20
Wednesday, April 22

Third paper due on Monday, April 20


**Week 14: The American Color Line**  
Monday, April 27  
Wednesday, April 29


**Week 15: Changing American Society**  
Monday, May 4  
Take-home final exam will be given out in class and will be due on Monday, May 11, 2015.


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**A final note on academic integrity and collaboration at Columbia:**

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others’ ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

If you have any questions about what constitutes a primary source to be cited, please come to see me during my office hours and we can talk in more details. For further information, please see: [http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity](http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/integrity)