



Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics

Lisa Lowe

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In *Immigrant Acts*, Lisa Lowe argues that understanding Asian immigration to the United States is fundamental to understanding the racialized economic and political foundations of the nation. Lowe discusses the contradictions whereby Asians have been included in the workplaces and markets of the U.S. nation-state, yet, through exclusion laws and bars from citizenship, have been distanced from the terrain of national culture.

Lowe argues that a national memory haunts the conception of Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of individual laws and sustained by U.S. wars in Asia, in which the Asian is seen as the perpetual immigrant, as the “foreigner-within.” In *Immigrant Acts*, she argues that rather than attesting to the absorption of cultural difference into the universality of the national political sphere, the Asian immigrant—at odds with the cultural, racial, and linguistic forms of the nation—displaces the temporality of assimilation. Distance from the American national culture constitutes Asian American culture as an alternative site that produces cultural forms materially and aesthetically in contradiction with the institutions of citizenship and national identity. Rather than a sign of a “failed” integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this critique preserves and opens up different possibilities for political practice and coalition across racial and national borders.

In this uniquely interdisciplinary study, Lowe examines the historical, political, cultural, and aesthetic meanings of immigration in relation to Asian Americans. Extending the range of Asian American critique, *Immigrant Acts* will interest readers concerned with race and ethnicity in the United States, American cultures, immigration, and transnationalism.

Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics Details

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Karla says

A very important book in the AAS canon, but really hard to get through--I haven't touched lit theory in a really long time. I'll probably reread it when I get to the proposal stage.

Anna says

Promising collection of essays; could have been super-interesting were the writing style not so INACCESSIBLE. That's the rub with academic writing, I suppose.

Christopher Tirri says

I was much more interested in the moments where Lowe used literary analysis to support her otherwise very politically-motivated arguments - it helped me understand what she was actually trying to see, specifically because I'd actually read most of the novels she discussed.

Ruan says

This is indeed the best book on Asian American politics which I have ever read. Perhaps her style is not to everyone's liking as her sentences might not mean much and feel truncated at times if one is not used to academic writing, yet her ideas are well-developed and her research is complete and thorough. At times she might sound overtly political and not so worried about literary analyses, but considering this is such an important issue, who can blame her?

Robyn says

Also for dissertation research. Also very useful. I like how she talked about LA and race relations there and some weirdo "multicultural" festival thing.

L says

A very balanced book that looks at the condition of the Asian immigrant through the light of history, literature and politics. Lowe is probably at her best and most passionate in the discussion of the state of Asian immigrant women, and of the need for all of us to cross borders of race, ethnicity and class in order to work towards positive change.

She manages to contextualize some basic ideas while at the same time going in depth with some theories of Marx, Althusser, Audre Lorde, Fanon, Benjamin, and others and connecting them to this situation in ways I haven't thought of previously. She also does some great reading of Jessica Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*, Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone*, Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart: A Personal History*, and, especially, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*.

Her writing can at times be dense and takes some getting used to, but it is a very important work to Asian American studies so it can't be ignored. It is winner of the 1997 Book Award in Cultural Studies from the Association for Asian American Studies and an Honorable Mention for the 1997 John Hope Franklin Prize for the best book published in American studies. It brings out some major issues in feminist studies, Marxist studies, and Asian American and immigrant history in general.

Sam says

This is a book I will be "reading" for the rest of my life, it feels like. I need to write a proper precis for each chapter, eventually, but here I will say that Lowe has been invaluable to me in understanding not only Asian American cultural production, but also just the imperialist nation state and its evil machinations overall. Processing her argument -- detailing the contradiction inherent in Asian Americans' path to citizenship along the economic axis, but the ways in which they are barred from the terrain of national culture and therefore are perennial "exotic" others (amongst many other things she argues) -- has been incredibly important work for me. Though Asian Americans are arguably the most privileged under global capitalism (though a statement such as that kind of glosses over the vast heterogeneity of Asian America), their displacement from national culture is not considered crisis. But to ignore the history of their inclusion would be remiss, as its legacy is still deeply felt today and has great implications on the current state of the nation. Though the racist rhetoric levied against Asians is a distinct from the violence African Americans suffer from, they are certainly interrelated. This book is required reading not just for scholars of Asian America, but anyone who is interested in Western imperialism, immigration, race relations, capitalist exploitation, and coalition building.

Nated Doherty says

Well, I'm done with this one for now, the pressures of the PhD workload, but I hope to return to it. I think Lowe shows herself here to be one of the few critical thinkers from the US that can do a Marxist infused reading of a text (for example, Hagedorn's *Dog eaters*) and actually talk about the text as it is, as opposed to just pasting the set political criticisms onto passages chosen seemingly at random (a la Messrs. Harvey and Jameson).

Here's hoping...
