The relationship between Asian Americans and the U.S. nation-state has been understood by a number of scholars as reciprocally traumatizing. The incorporation of racially-marked Asian Americans into the U.S. has been historically perceived and figured as an incursion, a wound, a rupture in the homogeneity of a national body that must be managed through legal exclusions and discrimination. Meanwhile, many argue that these historical exclusions have in turn "traumatized" Asian American identity, such that, as Anne Cheng writes, “in Asian American literature . . . assimilation foregrounds itself as a repetitive trauma.” This course will examine the concept of trauma and the cultural work it performs in both Asian American fiction and criticism. As we explore the ways trauma has enabled certain discussions about immigration, assimilation, and historical memory, we will also ask questions about the limits of trauma as a model for understanding these processes, and consider what discussions this widely prevalent paradigm might obscure or occlude.

**Course Requirements and Policies**

This course is a seminar, so attendance and active participation are mandatory. You should come to class having read and marked up the assigned texts carefully and thoroughly, and be prepared to share your thoughts and questions.

**Focus Points:** Once each week, you must post on Moodle one “focus point” or directed question (approximately 60 words) regarding the assigned reading. Focus points are due the night before class at 9 p.m. (either Monday or Wednesday evening, you may choose). Each focus point is worth 1% of your grade. These focus points should direct our attention to a specific passage, problem, or concern in the reading. Here are two examples:

1. In *Obasan*, the image of the mother hen attacking the chicks comes up several times; in one instance, this seems to be an allegory of whites interning the Japanese Canadians, but at the same time, the maternal image might be related to Naomi's mother – how should we interpret the image, and can these different readings be reconciled?

2. On page 61 of *Obasan*, Naomi describes feeling “exhilaration” and “fascination” in her abusive encounter with Old Man Gower. What are we to make of the disturbing implication that this scene of sexual abuse is somehow pleasurable to Naomi? And how does it relate to her internment experience, if at all? Could Kogawa possibly be suggesting internment was not so bad?

**Leading Discussion:** You will be required to lead discussion for a portion of one class over the semester, in pairs, which means preparing a series of discussion questions pointing us to specific passages in the reading. You will submit your presentation notes/outline to me. Sign-up will take place in the second week of class. (Discussion leaders will be excused from submitting a focus point that week.)
**Writing Assignments:** You will write three papers for this class; one brief 2-3 page paper to give you a sense of what I’m looking for in a paper; one midterm essay of 5-6 pages, and a final essay of 9-10 pages.

All papers should be double-spaced in Times New Roman or comparable font with 1-inch margins all around, and page numbers.

Late papers will downgraded 1/3 of a grade for each day after the deadline. If you foresee a problem meeting a paper deadline, please contact me well in advance about an extension.

**Evaluation:** Your final grade will be calculated in this way:

- Attendance and Participation: 8%
- Focus Points: 12%
- Leading Discussion: 10%
- Short Paper, 2-3 pages: 10%
- Midterm Essay, 5-6 pages: 25%
- Final Essay, 9-10 pages: 35%

**Students with Disabilities:** It is the policy of the university to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students, however, are responsible for registering with Disability Services, and for making requests known to me in a timely manner. If you require accommodations in this class, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible so that appropriate arrangements can be made. The procedures for registering with Disabilities Services can be found at: [www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/deans/disability-students.html).

**Honor Code:** Please sign the honor code at the top of the first page of all written assignments: “In accordance with the Honor Code, I affirm that this work is my own and all content taken from other sources has been properly acknowledged.” All work must be done in compliance with the Honor Code, which prohibits the following: the attempt to give or obtain assistance in a formal academic exercise without due acknowledgment; plagiarism; the submission of the same work for academic credit more than once without permission; willful falsification of data, information, or citations in any formal academic exercise; deception concerning adherence to the conditions set by instructor for the formal academic exercise; failure to take constructive action in the event of committing or observing a violation or apparent violation; providing false information and/or deceptive use of documents during an Honor Board hearing. If you need help with proper citations or you have questions on how to avoid plagiarism, let me know or contact the Writing Workshop: [www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/](http://www.wesleyan.edu/writing/workshop/).

**Required Texts (available at Broad Street Books):**
- Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, History*
- Theresa Cha, *Dictee*
- Anne Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*
- Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student*
- John Okada, *No-No Boy*
- Norma Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*
- Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*
- Chang-rae Lee, *A Gesture Life*
- Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*

All other readings to be posted on Moodle.
## Course Schedule (subject to change)

### WEEK ONE

1/26  
Introduction  
In class: Rea Tajiri, *History and Memory* (short film)

### WEEK TWO

1/31  
In class: Krzysztof Wodiczko, *The Hiroshima Projection* (video clip and interviews)

2/2  

### WEEK THREE

2/7  
Dominick LaCapra, from *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Ruth Leys, from *Trauma: A Genealogy*

2/9  
Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*; Margo Machida, from *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*

### WEEK FOUR

2/14  
Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*

2/16  
Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*

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**SHORT PAPER DUE**

### WEEK FIVE

2/21  
John Okada, *No-No Boy*

2/23  
John Okada, *No-No Boy*, David Eng, from *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*

### WEEK SIX

2/28  
Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student*

3/1  
Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student*

### WEEK SEVEN

3/6  
Susan Choi, *The Foreign Student*, selected critical essays

3/8  
Norma Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*
MIDTERM PAPER DUE

3/9-3/26  Spring Break

WEEK EIGHT

3/27  Norma Okja Keller, *Comfort Woman*, selected critical essays

WEEK NINE

4/3  Chang-rae Lee, *A Gesture Life*

WEEK TEN

4/10  Maxine Hong Kingston, from *The Woman Warrior*; David Eng & Shinhee Han, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia”; Anne Cheng, from *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*
4/12  Fae Ng, *Bone*; Lisa Lowe, from *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*

WEEK ELEVEN

4/17  Fae Ng, *Bone*
4/19  Theresa Cha, *Dictee*

WEEK TWELVE

4/24  Theresa Cha, *Dictee*; selected critical essays

WEEK THIRTEEN

5/1  Walter Benn Michaels, from *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History*
5/3  Lauren Berlant, “The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Politics”; Rey Chow, from *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere”

WEEK FOURTEEN

5/17  FINAL PAPER DUE