

AS 250: Introduction to American Studies
Instructor: ASLI TEKINAY
Spring 2024

Office: TB 420
Office hours: T 4 / TH 5/ by appointment

Course Description

This course examines the myths that made America. These myths are the essential narratives of the national beginnings of the United States and they have become the key references in discourses of *Americanness* through the ages. The core foundational myths of America still determine contemporary discussions of US-American identities. Yet, these myths should not be considered unchanging constants in the American national cultural imaginary. Their longevity and endurance are due to their adaptability, flexibility and narrative variation over time. This course examines the production of a unified US-American national identity through its foundational mythology and studies how it is questioned, criticized, or even debunked over time.

Class Policy

Students are expected to

- *attend at least 75% of the total number of classes
- *come to class having read the assigned material for the class

Evaluation

This course is designed as an interactive course.

Quizzes and assignments: 50%

Midterm exam: 25%

Final exam/project: 25 %

Full attendance (-1 allowed): 5% extra

- Optional assignments and voluntary oral presentations are 3 points extra

TEXTS:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1uCTwG6mpdpQJYhc0xJxdM54bS4mErcre?usp=sharing>

Tentative Syllabus

[all texts will be uploaded on google drive]

WEEK 1:

Feb. 13 Introduction to the course

Feb. 15 The Myth of Discovery: Christopher Columbus

Walt Whitman *Prayer of Columbus*

Ruben Dario's *A Colon (trans. To Columbus)*

WEEK 2:

Feb. 20 The Myth of Transatlantic Love: Pocahontas

[Assignment due Feb. 22: Analyze the lyrics in two songs - Neil Young's *Pocahontas* and Peggy Lee's *Fever*]

Neil Young's *Pocahontas*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZVcDCAKctMY>

Peggy Lee's *Fever*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGb5IweiYG8>

Feb. 22 Walt Disney's *Pocahontas* [voluntary presentation on the visual images of the film by a group of 3 students.]

[Assignment due Feb. 24: Analyze the visual representation of the myth in Terence Malick's film *The New World*.]

WEEK 3:

Feb. 27 The Myth of the Promised Land: Pilgrims and Puritans

[Optional assignment: Discuss how Bruce Springsteen uses the *Promised Land* rhetoric in his song by that name.]

Bruce Springsteen's *Promised Land*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAxyHv7k0hA>

Feb. 29 Anzia Yezierska's *America and I*

[Optional assignment: Key concepts in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*]

WEEK 4:

March 5 Myth of the Promised Land continued
[voluntary presentations: 1. Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter
/ 2. the Biblical Exodus narrative]

March 7 American Exceptionalism

WEEK 5:

March 12 American Exceptionalism continued
[voluntary presentation: St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letter III*]

March 14 Quiz on Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot*

WEEK 6:

March 19 The Myth of the Melting Pot: *E Pluribus Unum?*

March 21 African-American perspectives (W.E.B.DuBois: *The Souls of Black Folk*; texts from the Harlem Renaissance]

WEEK 7:

March 26 Quiz on Langston Hughes (*The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain*; Poems: *I, Too, America, Negro, Mulatto*) / George S. Schuyler's *The Negro Art Hokum*

March 28 Contesting the Melting Pot: Multiculturalism/ Cultural Pluralism

WEEK 8:

April 2 In-class response paper on Nella Larsen's Passing

April 4 Myth of the Self-Made Man / American Dream

WEEK 9: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 10

April 16 American Dream continued
[Quiz on Stephen Crane's *A Self-Made Man*]

April 18 **MIDTERM EXAM**

WEEK 11

April 23 **Immigrant Stories of Self-making**
[Voluntary presentation on Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather*]

April 25 Edward Albee "The Zoo Story"

[Assignment submission: Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*]

WEEK 12

April 30 **The Myth of Self-making in the African American Context**

May 2 **The Myth of Self-making in the African American Context**

WEEK 13

May 7 **Frederick Douglass' speeches; Barack Obama's victory speech**

May 9 **Presidential Campaign Speeches**

WEEK 14

May 14 **The Case of the Self-made Woman**

May 16 **The Case of the Self-Made Woman**