

AS 250: Introduction to American Studies: American Myths

Instructor: ASLI TEKİNAY
Spring 2026
M 3 4, W 6 (TB 155, TB 490)
Office: TB 420
Office hours: M 5, W 5

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

Tentative Syllabus

[all texts will be uploaded on google drive]

WEEK 1:

Feb. 9 Introduction to the course

Feb. 11 The Myth of Discovery: Christopher Columbus

Walt Whitman *Prayer of Columbus*

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

WEEK 2:

Feb. 16 The Myth of Transatlantic Love: Pocahontas

[Assignment due Feb. 18: 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=ZVcDCAKtMY>

Peggy Lee's *Fever*:

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

Feb. 18 Walt Disney's *Pocahontas* [voluntary presentation on the visual images of the film by a group of 3 students.]

[Assignment due Feb. 22: Analyze the visual representation of the myth in Terence Malick's film *The New World*.]

WEEK 3:

Feb. 23 The Myth of the Promised Land: Pilgrims and Puritans

[Assignment due Feb. 24: 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=YAxvHv7k0hA>

Feb. 25 Anzia Yezierska's *America and I*

WEEK 4:

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

March 4 American Exceptionalism

WEEK 5:

March 9 American Exceptionalism continued
[voluntary presentation: St. John de Crevecoeur's *Letter III*]

March 11 Quiz on Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot*

WEEK 6:

March 16 The Myth of the Melting Pot: *E Pluribus Unum?*

March 18 African-American perspectives (W.E.B.DuBois: *The Souls of Black Folk*; texts from the Harlem Renaissance]

WEEK 7:

March 23 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 25 Contesting the Melting Pot: Multiculturalism/ Cultural Pluralism

WEEK 8:

March 30 In-class response paper on Nella Larsen's *Passing*

April 1 Myth of the Self-Made Man / American Dream

WEEK 9:

April 6 American Dream continued
[Quiz on Stephen Crane's *A Self-Made Man*]

April 8 Immigrant Stories of Self-making
[Voluntary presentation on Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather*]

WEEK 10:

April 13 Immigrant Stories of Self-making
[Voluntary presentation on Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather*]

April 15 Edward Albee "The Zoo Story"

[Assignment due April 17: Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick*]

WEEK 11: SPRING BREAK

WEEK 12:

April 27 The Myth of Self-making in the African American Context

April 29 Frederick Douglass' speeches; Barack Obama's victory speech

WEEK 13

May 4 Presidential Campaign Speeches

May 6 The Case of the Self-made Woman

WEEK 14

May 11 Review

May 13 Review