

## 070.145 – Freshman Seminar, *The Idea of America*

Professor, Anand Pandian<sup>1</sup> / Teaching Assistant, Sarah Roth<sup>2</sup>  
Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University  
Spring 2019, Wednesdays 1:30-3:50 PM, Mergenthaler 439

America is an idea as much as a country, a place made and remade by the claims we make and the stories we tell. In this course, we draw on anthropological works, historical texts, poetry and fiction, and elements of popular culture to grapple with prevailing ideas of America, and what else this place might mean to its inhabitants and others. We will follow the foundational themes of freedom, landscape, migration, and belonging, and we will explore, through social media, how such ideas circulate in contemporary American life. We'll take the classroom itself as a space for civic participation.

**Materials.** There are five books to purchase for the course (Soldier, Stone, Anzaldúa, Nguyen, Rankine). Other readings will be available via Blackboard. And remember the hashtag #IdeaOfAmerica

**Activities** (and % of overall grade). This class is a seminar; attendance at all class sessions is required, as is active participation in classroom discussion (20%). By the crack of dawn each Wednesday morning, we ask you to post a paragraph reflection on the week's reading on the Blackboard discussion forum (20%). You'll have the chance to curate some relevant American pop culture for one class session (5%) and to manage the class Twitter account @ExamineAmerica for a week (5%). We ask you to work carefully on one piece of writing (an essay, personal narrative, a work of cultural criticism or social observation, or a work of fiction or poetry, 3000 words or less) over the course the semester: as a draft submission to us (10%) and a final submission (20%). We ask you to keep a semester-long journal to help develop this project, and we expect that you will make at least one narrative reflection in the journal each week (10%). You will have the chance to workshop your writing project with the class once over the course of the semester, and the quality of your responses to the writing of your peers will also count toward your grade (10%). We will be sharing these drafts with each other via the online blogging platform Medium, and you will have the chance, if you so choose, and when you wish, to publish your writing on Medium and to share this as a public reflection of your own on the idea of America. This is strictly optional; whether or not you choose to publish your work for the class will have no bearing on your course grade.

**Policies** – (1) *Email*. You will receive periodic notices and instructions concerning coursework on your JHU email account; you are responsible for ensuring receipt of these messages.

(2) *Electronic devices*. Use of such devices is distracting and discouraged when unnecessary for class activities. If this expectation will pose a problem for you, please talk to us about this individually.

(3) *Disability*. Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class should obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland.

(4) *Social media*. When you represent the class online, please engage others in a spirit of mutual understanding and responsibility. Remember, we are cultivating a collective voice of respectful inquiry.

(5) *Human subjects*. Anthropologists have ethical obligations to the human subjects of their work. Students are required to pass a classroom protocol, and student coursework should meet the expectations of the American Anthropological Association: <http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/>

(6) *Academic integrity*. The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Office hours Tuesdays 1:30-3:30 PM, Mergenthaler 454 / [pandian@jhu.edu](mailto:pandian@jhu.edu)

<sup>2</sup> Office hours Mondays 10:00 AM-12:00 PM, Mergenthaler 440 / [sarahroth@jhu.edu](mailto:sarahroth@jhu.edu)

<u>Introduction</u>	January 30	Mark Bradford, <i>Tomorrow is Another Day</i> , Baltimore Museum of Art
<u>Freedom</u>	February 6	Thomas Paine, "Common Sense," 1776  Eric Foner, "Thomas Paine and American Radicalism During the American Revolution," 2009  AAA Ethics Statement <a href="http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/">http://ethics.americananthro.org/category/statement/</a>
	February 13	Henry David Thoreau, <i>Walden</i> , 1854, excerpts
		<b>CITI Classroom Protocol due</b>
	February 20	Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" 1852, and <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i> , 1855, excerpts
<u>Landscape</u>	February 27	Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," 1893  Walt Whitman, <i>Leaves of Grass</i> , 1892, excerpts
		<b>Journals due</b>
	March 6	Layli Long Soldier, <i>Whereas</i> , 2017  <i>Illegal Immigration: The View from the Land</i> , virtual tour of the Pequot Museum in Mashantucket, CT, Akomawt Educational Initiative
	March 13	Nomi Stone, <i>Kill Class</i> , 2019
<u>Migration</u>	March 27	Henry James, <i>The American Scene</i> , 1907, excerpts  George Creel, "Melting Pot or Dumping Ground?" 1921
	April 3	Gloria Anzaldúa, <i>Borderlands—La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i> , 1987
		<b>Journals and writing project drafts due</b>
	April 10	Viet Thanh Nguyen, <i>The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives</i> , 2018
<u>Belonging</u>	April 17	Claudia Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> , 2014
	April 24	Eric Klinenberg, <i>Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life</i> , 2018, excerpts
	May 1	Anand Pandian, <i>Impervious: The Walls We Live With, and How to See Beyond Them</i> , manuscript, excerpts
		<b>Journals and writing projects due</b>