

## *American Dreams/ American Realities*

*History 130D*  
*Spring 2016*

*Gerald L. Wilson*  
*04 Allen Building*  
*(919) 684-2865*

This course examines the role of such myths as “success, “agrarian”, “city on the hill”, “frontier” and the “foreign devil” in defining the American character and determining our hopes, fears, dreams and actions throughout American History. Attention will be given to the surface consistency of these myths as accepted by each immigrant group versus the shifting content of the myths as they change to reflect the hopes and values of each of these groups and cultural and economic changes.

### **I. REQUIRED READING**

#### **BOOKS – available at the Textbook Store**

Appy, Christian, *American Reckoning*

DeParle, Jason, *American Dreams*

Egan, Timothy, *The Worst Hard Time*

Miller, Arthur, *Death of a Salesman*

Moody, Anne, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

Potter, David, *People of Plenty*

Rosenblum, Robert and Gerald Wilson, **Course Pak:** *The Value of Myth*

Schlesinger, Arthur M., *The Disuniting of America*

**COURSE DOCUMENTS-** available on Sakai: <https://sakai.duke.edu/>)

### **II. *Discussion Groups and Written Assignments***

Each student will enroll in one discussion section. Discussion sections will meet at the designated times approximately every week and will focus on specific assignments related to course readings. For some of these sessions, papers on assigned readings and topics will be required. ***If a student is absent for a group discussion session, excused or unexcused, the student will be required to hand in a 3 page (double-spaced) analytic essay on the assigned readings prior to the next discussion group meeting.***

Late papers will be accepted with a penalty of one-half letter grade per class period.

Dates and Assignments for Discussion Groups (all course documents are available on Sakai)

**January 15–** Introduction- Discussion of American Character

**January 22 –** Whither the Myths?

**Book:** Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*

**Sakai:** Jeremy Rifkin, “The European Dream”

**January 29–** Success Myth

**Course Pak:** Chapters I and II

**February 5 –** Success Myth

**Book:** DeParle, *American Dreams*

**Book:** Miller, *Death of a Salesman*

**February 12 – Frontier Myth**

**Book:** Potter, *People of Plenty*, Chapters III, VII and IX

**Sakai:** Amley, “Politics and the Myth of the Frontier”

**February 19– Agrarian Myths**

**Book:** Potter, *People of Plenty*, Chapter VII

**Sakai:** Becker, “Ideal Farms vs. Industrial Farms”; Goldman and Dickens, “The Selling of Rural America”

**February 24,– Midterm Exam**

**February 26– Foreign Devil Myth**

**Sakai:** Worth, “*A Nation Defined By Its Enemies- Conspiracy Within*”; Senator Joseph McCarthy, “*Conspiracy Within*” (The Wheeling WV Speech), Newsweek, “Papal Court”

March 4 City on a Hill Myth

**Book:** Potter, *People of Plenty*, Chapters V & VI

**Sakai:** President Ronald Reagan, “Farewell Address” (Speech); Governor Mario Cuomo, “Convention Speech” (Governor Mario Cuomo Challenges President Reagan’s Portrayal of Americans as Shining City on a Hill); Winston, “From Theological Tenet to Political Password”

**March 11th Paper Due**

**March 11 – Myths: Transitions and Transformations**

**Book:** Potter, *People of Plenty*, Chapter IV

**Course Pak:** Chapter III

**March 25 – Myths: Transitions and Transformations**

**Sakai:** Shubach, “Dr. Seuss and the American Myths”

**April 1 – The 20’s: The Clash of Myths- From Poor Richard to Jay Gatsby**

**Sakai:** “A Map of New York”; “I Lift My Lamp Beside The Golden Door”; “A Test of Opportunity”

The 30’s: The Dream Falter, The Myths Fail – Temporarily

**Book:** Egan, *The Worst Hard Time*

**Sakai:** “Letters to the Roosevelts during the Depression”; President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “I want you to Write to Me”; Agee & Evans (excerpt), “Let Us Now Praise Famous Men”; Huey Long, “Share the Wealth”

**April 8 – The Post-war Years, 1945-1963 Recovery and Triumph – For Some**

**Book:** Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*

**April 15 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Paper Due**

The 60’s The Fabric of Society “Rent Asunder”

**Sakai:** Harrington, “The Other America”; Friedan, “The Feminine Mystique”; Keohane, “The Glass Ceiling,” Faulkner-Tucker, “Women Assault the Citadel”; M.L.King, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; Wilson, “The Year of Living Meaningfully”; Malcom X, “The

Black Revolution Speeches”; Carmichael, “Black Power”; “Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968)”

**April 22**– Vietnam and the Home Front – “America’s Vision of Itself as Benevolent, Wise, and Invincible Drained Away in the Jungles of Vietnam”

**Book:** Christian Appy, *American Reckoning*

**Sakai:** Cavan, “Uncovering Vietnam: War Journalism and Its Impact on American Mythology”

### **III. Examinations**

**Mid Term – Wednesday, February 24, 2016**

**Final – Tuesday, May 3, 2016 9:00-noon**

### **IV. Evaluation of Performance**

Evaluation of a student’s performance will be based primarily on three factors:

(1) Performance on the mid-term and final examination

**Midterm: 20%**

**Final: 30%**

(2) Quality of the written assignments

**Paper #1: 15%**

**Paper #2: 15%**

(3) Attendance at and participation in discussion sections

**Attendance / Participation: 20%**

Consideration will be made in assessing the student’s final grade should a student excel in one of the three categories.

Please note that classes will meet every Monday and Wednesday for lecture. Discussion sections will meet as indicated. **Excessive absences from lectures or discussion group meetings will weigh heavily in the assignment of the final grade.**

### **V. Questions/ Problems**

The Instructor will seek to be available to students form discussion of matters pertaining to the course. Please call (919) 684-2865 or come by 04 Allen Building to arrange an appointment. Since priority will be given to class members, please identify yourself as a member of the class.

Your TA’s for the course are graduate students in History:

Aaron Colston      [agcolston@gmail.com](mailto:agcolston@gmail.com)

Daanish Farugi      [daanish.farggi@duke.edu](mailto:daanish.farggi@duke.edu)