For centuries, Americans have been fascinated with our possibilities as John Winthrop famously stated: "We shall be as a city upon a hill; the eyes of all people are upon us." Desires to foster an exemplary community for the rest of the world to admire and to follow suit have inspired theories and practices that aim to address intellectual issues—both religious and secular—as well as material needs that arise in the pursuit of our imagination.

In this seminar, we will attempt to understand continued enthusiasm for self-perceived perfection in an environment where human weaknesses are enlarged in racism, sexism, imperialism, and more. We will meet with characters who are determined to extract more satisfactory experiences out of lackluster/painful lives. And we will deconstruct some or all of the theories and practices to see what lie within, how they relate, and to what extent they might have remained influential in our interactions with the rest of the world today.