



## CALL FOR PAPERS: “AMERICAN (ANTI-)HEROES”

*aspeers: emerging voices in american studies*  
Call for Submissions by October 20, 2024

From the popularity of superhero comics to cult movements around religious leaders, from venerating political figures to idolizing pop-culture celebrities, images and constructions of ‘heroes’ play a significant role in US culture. Simultaneously, there are people and actions outside of the limelight that have been revered as heroic, for example the voluntary work of nurses in homeless shelters and hospitals. While often tied to individuals, heroism occurs not just in these personified forms but can be attached to larger movements, events, or groups in more abstract ways as well. Both the figure of the hero and heroization more generally have equally frequently been weaponized throughout US history or used as a tool for political manipulation. Ultimately, such a larger ‘hero culture’ in the US invites complex nuances and ambiguities, visible for instance in the veneration of explicit *anti*-hero figures in literature and popular culture, from Jay Gatsby or Holden Caulfield to Dirty Harry, Hannibal Lecter, or Walter White.

At the core of all these phenomena lie processes of heroization: the conscious construction of something as ‘heroic,’ ascribing certain values meant to glorify a particular person, act, or event. The widespread cultural visibility of US (anti-)heroes and heroism begs a number of questions: Is there perhaps a particular penchant for heroization in US culture, and if so, why? What are the specific (gendered, racialized, classed, etc.) characteristics that turn some figures into heroes and others into anti-heroes? Which forms, genres, or media lend themselves particularly well to heroization? How have attributions of heroism changed or have been reassessed throughout US history? How (anti-)heroic do aspects of the US seem from a global or transnational perspective, e.g. in the face of US imperialism?

For its eighteenth issue, *aspeers* dedicates its topical section to “**American (Anti-)Heroes**” and invites European graduate students to critically and analytically explore US literature, (popular) culture, history, politics, society, and media through the lens of the ‘(anti-)hero.’ We welcome papers from all disciplines, methodologies, and approaches comprising American studies and related fields, and especially those that critically engage constructions and narrations of heroism. Potential papers could cover (but are not limited to):

- Representations of (anti-)heroes and heroism in literature, film, TV, games, etc.
- The construction of superheroines and (anti-)heroines
- Political or religious leadership; cults; political polarization
- Celebrity culture, e.g. in music, art, and literature, or as interwoven with social media and digital culture
- Reevaluations of historical or political figures and events in later decades (e.g. the ‘Founding Fathers’)
- Veterans as (anti-)heroes of war; ‘heroic’ figures in sports or science
- Heroism in specific decades, e.g. within the Civil Rights Movement
- Notions of ‘everyday heroism’ (e.g. within family units, constructions of mother-/fatherhood)
- Connections between hero culture and memory culture
- Leadership and hero cultures in different (sub)cultures and groups, e.g. from a Native American perspective

*aspeers*, the first and currently only graduate-level peer-reviewed print journal of European American studies, encourages fellow MA students from all fields to reflect on the diverse meanings of “American (Anti-)Heroes.” We welcome term papers, excerpts from theses, or papers specifically written for the eighteenth issue of *aspeers* by October 20, 2024. If you seek to publish work beyond this topic, please refer to our general Call for Papers. Please consult our submission guidelines and find some additional tips at [www.aspeers.com/2025](http://www.aspeers.com/2025).